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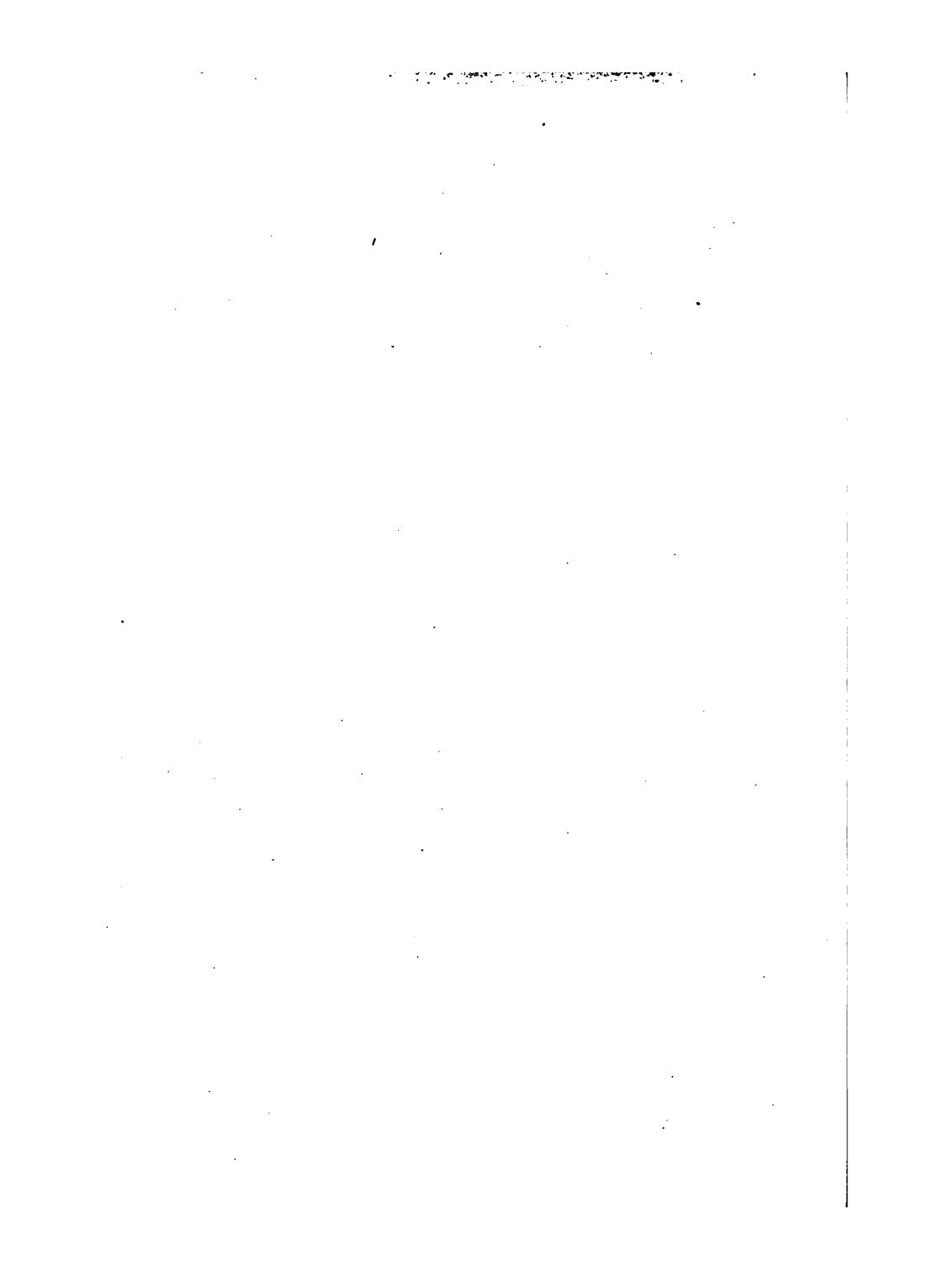




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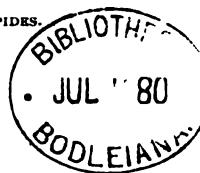
VOL. II.

οὐκ ἔστι δότης οὐκ αἴ φιλος

EURIPIDES.

'But this was taught me by the dove,  
To die—and know no second love.  
This lesson yet hath man to learn,  
Taught by the thing he dares to spurn:  
The bird that sings within the brake,  
The swan that swims upon the lake,  
One mate, and one alone, will take.'

BYRON.



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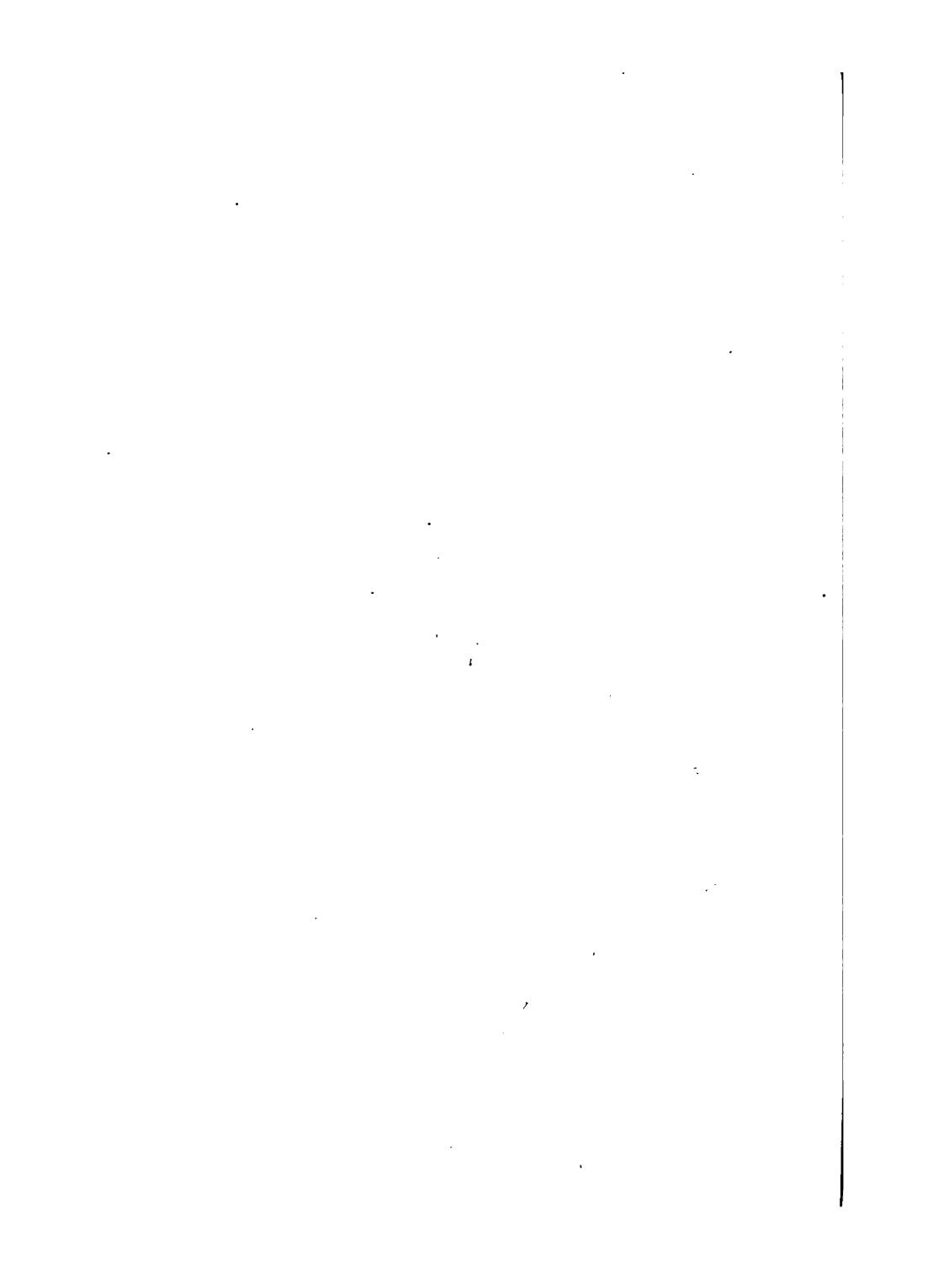
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# MY ONLY LOVE.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE HEART WILL BREAK.

I HAD suffered myself to be comforted to live—not as loving my life, yet thankful to God who had kept what he had made, even while his everlasting image was shut out from my darkened spirit by the mortal shadow I had learned to worship in my blind idolatry. I felt that it was sweet to live and quaff revival of lost strength in the bright summer sun, whose daughter I was, even though it seemed as if no love, nor joy, nor pleasure beneath his beams could ever again come to me. Will not the strong

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spirit of youth give all that it has for dear life?

Yes, the very life that was in me I had been taught to value as something, since I had assayed, against its ills that seemed intolerable to bear, the Lesbian's awful remedy. It was better to be content as I was, in calm unhappiness, than to give my fair body to cold corruption and return in disobedience to my Maker the existence he had given me, as a wasted talent in my hand.

Not valueless was that existence to one, at least, other than myself, my poor grandmother. I could not wound her fondness now I knew she was the only creature who truly loved me, little as that quiet parental feeling could amend the bruises of my passionate regrets. One great boon had fate granted me—these regrets, these miseries I had put upon myself, unknown to her from whom above all the world it behoved me to bury the past out of sight. I should never have heard the end of my folly—since I had failed of achievement—therefore it was some ease to my troubles that my grandmother should suspect every

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imagined cause for them, except the true one.

Occupation I found the most effectual panacea for my heart-disease ; steady, constant application in endeavours to turn my talents to use. If I could not win my love, I could prove that I deserved both love and honor by my own efforts—at least, I would try ; the spur to my exertions was sharp sorrow, the artist's true teacher. I worked for hours every day, to conquer for myself the dreary science that threads its way through the intricate mazes of harmony ; and for rest and recreation I practised my singing voice ; I was fain to be a great musician, both as composer and executant of my own works, and my struggles were as hard as my aim was high, unaided by better tutorship than remote and primitive Cornwall could furnish me withal.

Poor, good Mr. Nightingale had felt my capacity outgrow his teaching powers, a fact not unknown to myself, although I pretended not to see, before the time that he became obnoxious, to suspicions of partiality to me as a pupil, such as combined to render any renewal of musical instruction

a little too much for his prudence. I knew enough of music and singing for any young lady, so he told my grandmother ; I was the best musician in the county by many degrees, and wanted no more lessons ; on any occasion, he would be happy to give me his advice as a friend. This tended in the do-nothing direction, as did also the hints of sundry old ladies to my grandmother, conveying darkly the intimation, through the discreet periphrase ‘they say,’ that it was commonly supposed she intended me for a ‘musicianer,’ in consequence of my continual practising from morning till night ; that it was not ladylike to want to sing like a professor ; that it was indecorous for a young lady’s voice to make itself heard in church above the whole choir ; that though a good voice might be a gift, it was no proof of holiness ; that while the wicked possessed, the elect might be without it —an assumption impossible to gainsay, and quite too much for grannie’s composure. I am afraid I made my mock of the caviller, and declared my voice, such as it might be, was none of my making, and those who objected to it would do well

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to try and make a better one as a present to me, or take that I had as it came! I laughed, but I lost patience, and determined to try and rise above this petty corner of the world, where there was no fit scope for me.

‘Grannie,’ I said one morning, ‘I want to go to London to learn to sing: I am wasting my time, and I am afraid only spoiling my voice—there is no one here to teach me.’

‘Whatever is come to the girl? go to London merely to learn to sing——’

‘I don’t say that altogether. In London I should be tolerated in my devotion to music; here it is considered improper for a girl to do anything in earnest.’

‘How do you know anything about London? You never would tell me what happened to you, during those dreadful weeks. If you did, I could give you my advice—you would not take it, though. Well, you must find out everything for yourself by bitter experience. I always knew you would fail if you attempted the stage; you know how I warned you, and I tell you now, I don’t believe your voice is

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strong enough to sing in a large London drawing-room before such critics as the men in town : they consider it an offence to society to attempt it, unless a first-rate singer—it is no use for amateurs to sing before company, except married women, who get praised because people want to please their husbands !'

I was not yet divested of a maiden author's shamefacedness as to my desire to be a composer of music, no less than an adept in the art. Being shy of the former fact, I gave my remonstrance a turn accordingly.

'Whether I sing before company or not—and I am not likely to have the chance—I have set my whole heart on being a thorough musician, not a mere smatterer, like most girls who attempt to play and sing : music is an art most arduous to excel in, an abstruse science——'

'Then, my dear Lily, what in the world do you want to have to do with it for? What good is this humor of puzzling your brain about things that can never be of the slightest use to advance you in life? A girl wants to be practical, to be advised by

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those who have experience in the world ; thorough bass, or point-counters, or whatever they call it, are only a nonsensical device to throw away a girl's time ; you can no more teach yourself such things than you could algebra, believe me. Wait till after you are married ; then you can get your husband to have you taught, if he likes.'

' Married or unmarried, I can't stop composing music. Whether I compose anything worth the name of music depends upon the direction of my studies—good or bad, I must compose—I can't wait till I'm married, for that.'

' That's all no use—you never can make anything of it, only to keep yourself back in the world—you never could write a piece of music or an opera, like a real composer—it's only men can do it.'

' I must try—I cannot help trying, if I could ; I must compose, if I burn all I write—if I stopped it I should die.'

This was unanswerable, so grannie shifted her argument.

' You never would tell me what took you on that wild journey to London ; I am sure your voice is not strong enough for a

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public singer ; you know what happened when you would go on the stage, the way you were criticised—it is degrading to a lady to be made liable to such remarks. You're not fit for the stage ; you never would take my advice, but Mrs. Heathcote said you were not fit. As sure as you attempt to go on the stage you will fail, and it will kill me.'

' I have no wish whatever to do anything of the sort—I hate the very name of the stage.'

' I'm glad to hear you say so.'

' Only I must change my way of life. I am miserable : I must see the world sometime.'

' Well, yes, that is true—we must see what can be done ; but we have not money enough. How can I have you taken out in London ?'

' Consent to my going, Grannie darling, and I will think about a way ; I'm clever, you always said.'

' Well, yes, think of a plan ; but don't trust to your singing—your voice is not, never will be——'

I went away impatient : this subject of

my voice, and its supposed want of strength, was a sore one between us. In spite of the scandal in church and remarks of neighbours on its penetrating powers, it lacked the hard hitting quality supposed to constitute a 'great singer,' while, as I practised longer and louder by myself, its volume seemed to be spent instead of increasing. Here was something wrong on which I took my resolve to consult Mr. Nightingale 'as a friend,' since he refused to be my teacher any longer, as also to take soundings as to an introduction into musical society in London, where I knew he had connections, and I felt that in no other than an artistic circle could I make good my claim to be received on equal terms, and on such would I be or none.

Being apprehensive of collision with Mrs. Nightingale, I wrote to ask him to call at our house. He answered promptly to the summons, and caught me in an unlucky hour, reading a history of the Indian Mutiny, and all the heart-stirring events past but a few years and still working in the public mind as part of actual life. Mr. Nightingale took the book, moodily, as I

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laid it down on his entrance, looked into it, and then at me, with a sharp glance of conviction, taking in the situation. He had stumbled upon a passage treating of Arthur's greatest achievement; he took offence thereat, and flung down the volume, out of which fell a slip of paper, on which I had been taking some notes objectionable to Mr. Nightingale; he pounced upon the paper and examined it, looking askance through discomposed spectacles, but refrained from any remark. To break an awkward pause, I rushed into the subject of our interview, being wound up to my purpose like a clock, unclogged by any grain of tact among its irresponsible wheels.

'I wish to consult you as my best friend,' I said, trying to find the right way of stroking down the rough coat of my cross and affectionate old porcupine: 'I wish to ask a great favor—that you would help me to get known to some of your musical friends. I want to lead an artist's life—I am fit for no other—and in London.'

'London! Yes; you've been there already, to make new friends for yourself, till you've forgotten your old ones.'

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'Oh no!'

'Yes; the red coat makes the man nowadays, that's your opinion, I see, Miss Lily, like all the rest of you girls. The most silly, ridiculous, absurdly infatuated monkeys are all the young women, that care for nobody, except somebody who never cares for them—what fools you are!'

'Not I, Mr. Nightingale; my troubles have come in an opposite direction—I have made myself quite a phalanx of formidable enemies in my rejected admirers. I find this part of the country is grown too hot, for the very reason that if all the men I have ever met in Cornwall and Devon were rolled into one heap, I shouldn't care a feather's weight for the whole lot of them put together!'

'Oh, ay, that's all very fine, Miss Lily, to tell me you don't care a button for your country friends, but you were glad enough to take all the teaching I could give you, and I taught you till I got fond of you, like my own daughter, and now you don't care a straw—well, I deserve it, as I've brought it on myself, like an old fool—and there's no fool so bad as that—that's what you've made of me.'

'Oh, Mr. Nightingale, how can you say so? I never meant you—such a dear old friend as you—in what I said about the men here in general; you don't belong to the county, and you can't fall in love with me, to quarrel about that. I never said such things of you, indeed.'

'Well, well, I suppose I must believe you: well, go to London if you like, I'll do all I can for you. That Indian fellow is off to his post, so you won't meet him there, so much the better for yourself. I only wish he would sink to the bottom of the Red Sea on his passage over.'

Here was a guess at my terrible secret, but I tried to throw him out by putting a bold face upon it. 'To be drowned like the Egyptians? How cruel of you! I hate you for saying that, Mr. Nightingale.'

'Hate me? that means love him. Here am I, who have devoted myself to you like a slave, to do anything in the world you could ask me, I, who never refused you any mortal thing, and you say you hate me, for the sake of a fellow who wouldn't care if you were dead and buried to-morrow.'

'Very likely; I don't expect he would care.'

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‘Yes he would, though ; the rascal has vanity, and likes it to be thought he can have a girl like you to worship him as a divinity.’

‘I’m afraid all the world does that.’

‘No, only silly women ; ’tis absurd to make a hero of him for mere bull-dog courage, when there are scores of better men—a fellow for whom I have the utmost contempt.’

‘Now, Mr. Nightingale, I don’t believe you at all.’

‘Oh, women, women, this is the perversity of them ! You make a fool of me, that’s my thanks, as your devoted friend ; and for that man, who in all human probability never wastes a thought upon you, once you are out of sight, you indulge a passion that betrays itself in every possible and impossible shape and way. Treat a woman with neglect—that’s the secret to win her affections.’

‘I have no affections to be won. I am wedded to music—I want to be a public singer; that’s better than pining away for love.’

‘H’m ! not so sure of that ; I’d rather

see a daughter of mine laid in her coffin than let her go before the public.'

'Perhaps your daughter might object that we cannot get into our coffins when we want to; we've got to die first, and to live before we die, and I cannot live an idle life without an object: I had rather die than do that.'

'So you want to be a public singer because you can find nothing else to do? You'll have all the idle good-for-nothing scamps about town dangling and hanging to your apron-strings.'

Man-like, he disliked the idea of my attracting general admiration, and would have preferred my wearing the willow in a bandbox, with no comfort but such sympathy as he could spare me out of his conjugal obligations. There was so much in my suspected misfortune in Arthur's case not displeasing to this friend of mine. I tried to make him a soft answer.

'I should reject all particular attentions, and content myself with public admiration in a general way.'

'Public admiration! Do you mean the stage?' He had heard, then, of my supposed

craze in that direction. ‘ You are not fit for the stage, if that’s what you mean : your features are too small, your mouth could not be distinguished from your nose and eyes at a distance—no ; you want to be seen near, like a cameo, and the closer you are looked at, the better your good points are appreciated.’

‘ I have been told very much the contrary.’

‘ And you’ve believed it, have you ? Women will believe any fool who tells them what they like.’

‘ I shall believe you, if you tell me my voice will make me a great concert singer ; that is what I aim at—not the stage.’

‘ The platform—next door to it, it’s all the same thing. Well, I can’t undertake to say what your voice will be in a couple of years or so—it may get strength as you grow older : you want to eat the grain in the ear, like all young people. Patience is the grand secret of success, and that you’ve got to learn.’

With this doubtful encouragement, and a promise, which I knew he would keep, ‘ I’ll do all I can for you, Lily,’ we parted : he to write to London, with a view to my

proper introduction through friends of his; I  
to talk over my grandmother to the project  
and plan to be agreed upon between us.

After a struggle I was allowed to do my choice. I was to take two hundred a year out of our common resources, and to be located in a musical family, where I should have proper protection during my studies, to be pursued under the Royal Academy of Music; nothing was to be decided, nor yet absolutely forbidden, but I was to pay as an amateur student. My grandmother's pride would suffer no reduced terms for my teaching. No time was fixed for my staying in London, or for my return.

And so I bore away to a new scene the strong young life that could not be crushed out. I left behind me the one voice that was loving enough to chide me, and went, unguided, out into the deep and broad current of the world. Behind me, too, I left my harp, whose chords sent a thrill through my pulses indissolubly mingled with the memories of him I would fain remember no more; yet I kept his faded flowers within my bosom still, close to the weak, fond heart that broke for love of him!

There stood upon a pedestal within a niche in our old parlor a marble bust of my dead father ; when no eye could see me, I threw my arms round its neck, as though it lived, and laid my head upon the stone-cold breast, to wish I were like him !

This could not be, and so I was leaving my home far behind me, to seek another lot than my birth had cast for me.



## CHAPTER II.

AND BROKENLY LIVE ON.

I WAS put, with all due form of leave-taking and charges to the guard, into the ladies' compartment of a railway carriage, at Stornmouth, to be taken out at the London Terminus, with every precaution proper under the circumstances, by one Miss Raleigh, mistress of a suburban school, who received a few independent lady students of art, science, or literature, besides her regular pupils ; I being consigned to her address as a safe and convenient standpoint for the prosecution of my musical studies and ulterior plans yet undecided. On my arrival, as I stood alone upon the platform, I saw a kindly face, not quite unknown, advance with the friendly challenge, ‘ Miss Fortescue, I believe ?’

'Yes ; then you are Miss Raleigh ?' I answered, with a little start of half recognition.

'We are not quite strangers,' she said ; 'do you remember where I saw you once ? I knew you in a moment.'

'I do remember your face—I cannot recall when—'

'I saw you at Stormouth ; you played Desdemona with—'

My whole head and neck tingled with a sudden rush of blood as I broke in with, 'Oh, I know, I know now ! You are the lady who sat near us at Stormouth Park Theatricals. I remarked you in conversation with a gentleman and lady, and indeed I listened to every word you said that evening. I was as much interested as in the play.'

'I'm glad to hear you say so ; Lady Diana Hope Trevor is a great pet of mine. I knew her before she was married ; we were young women together, but she is younger than I am. I like to say so, because she cares about her youth and beauty so much. No wonder—she is a very lovely woman.'

Here was a situation for me! My new friend, in the simplicity and goodness of her heart, entwining herself within the coils of the beautiful serpent whose sting was in my bosom, and I dared not say a word; silence between my enemy and me was our mutual due. I only prayed that we might never meet, considering she must pass much of the year in London. It was a drop of comfort to know that she had not followed Arthur, now gone out to fill a high command in India.

The leaves were falling in the dull, damp chill of London's sad November when I left my sunny home to live in the precincts of the great city—Milton's city—that attracted me towards its mighty whirl of life, like the minnow that glances above the river. I lived in quiet, studying and practising music several hours every day, composing, when I chanced to find, in a happy hour, some new phrase of melody, some yet unthought-of mixture of sweet sounds; these works I submitted to my master's criticism, and afterwards would correct and improve as new ideas grew upon hints and glimpses of harmonies—so

I was becoming mistress of my inspirations and musical sensations, instead of being led away, on a wild, rushing stream of notes, I knew not whither.

As to my voice, I was ordered three months' complete rest, to my intense disgust, as a preliminary to systematic exercise. By nature a mezzo-soprano, I had been too ambitious in forcing it up towards the seldom-attained heights of the pure soprano sphere, to the detriment of the middle notes, whose mellow tones, wherewith I was richly gifted, had suffered loss in consequence. All this, I was told, must be reformed. First, to correct the abuse of my voice, I must give it time to reassert itself; then, in judicious practice, I must check my energy of work, and rather play with the shy sweet notes, which will not suffer violence, but must be rather caressed out of the singer's throat, until little by little, day after day, they become fixed like the register of an instrument made by hands, from whence the brilliant scale rings out true and strong, with a touch of something divine that no marvel of human handiwork could ever match—an echo of the far

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heaven where the angels and spirits sing.

With study and labour came patience to bear the sorrow to which woman, even more than man, is born. I was working it off, until it became a thing to be endured along with life, as an inevitable pain; my earnestness, too, excited an interest in my favor with those among whom I now lived, not being considered, as heretofore, a kind of social crime in a young lady. Even before it was judged prudent for me to sing, Miss Raleigh introduced me to several distinguished friends, literary and artistic, as a musical genius, and to my first efforts, both as composer and vocalist, the kindest welcome of encouragement was shown. Once or twice a month, musical parties filled Miss Raleigh's large drawing-rooms with a company such as rank and wealth might have desired in vain to draw together. Fashion and beauty did not disdain to mix with the self-made celebrities of talent in these receptions of the hard-working mistress of a school. My pleasure was intense in these assemblies, so different from my former distasteful experience of society,

and with Miss Raleigh, a woman after my own heart, I grew more at home every day. Her love of art extended itself to the artist in every case. I found in her, too, a piety deep and earnest, not demonstrative ; the religion which consists in submission of self to Providence, with charity to all others—I never heard her say an unkind word of anyone, in all the time I knew her—and, contrary to my former experience, too she made to herself no merit of puritanic lines of exclusion against the possessors of any art, charm, or attraction, such as makes the delight of life, when it turns not to abuse : in one word, to her ugliness was not a virtue in itself, nor beauty a sin.

We grew intimate, and she told me her story. Her father, like mine, was an officer high in the Indian service. He died in the prime of life, leaving a family of many daughters absolutely destitute, Charlotte Raleigh, the eldest, being little over twenty. At first she tried the miserable life of a governess ; conscious of natural gifts, she resolved, at twenty-five, to seek independence by a more congenial occupation. She wrote a story and sent it to a magazine,

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where it was accepted, and with the modest sum received for her work, she took a tiny house of her own in London, brought to her assistance two younger sisters, better qualified than herself as to the drudgery of teaching, and set up a daily boarders' school, which prospered, and thus the sisters gained a home and much kindness from the public, which is, after all, the best earthly friend of those who want help and protection. This was Miss Raleigh's remark, as she told me I too might be sure I should find it so.

And so the winter went by, not unprofitably, and spring brought the season of Italian opera, the goal of my eager expectations for months before the southern queens of song took wing for rainy Britain. An order for a box came to Miss Raleigh for one of the early nights, when the great rush of the upper ten thousand has not yet set in among the crimson or amber satin curtains. One of the older classical operas was to be given, the heroine by a great prima donna, whose name was familiar in my ears from a child ; now, I was told, I should find but the remnant of her voice

and beauty. This mattered not to me : to see her was an epoch in my life, and though her grandly moulded form and queenly brow had lost the charm of youth, though several of her notes were held with an effort, and once I detected a semitone out of tune, the perfection of her art left me nothing to desire either in the actress or the singer—I felt that once she was gone, her match would never again be seen upon the lyric stage within our time.

I sat entranced, leaning forward against the balustrade, with hands pressed tight against my breast, from whence the hot pants rose and parted my lips ; my eyes' eager straining, fixed upon the stage, saw nothing at all above or around me. I was startled by the clapping of a door, which shook me out of my rapt attention, because the singer, discomposed, threw an offended glance towards the box from whence the interruption came ; my eye followed, and there, opposite to me, in a lower tier, rustling to a front seat with much circumstance of ermined mantle and rebellious crinoline, was the Lady Diana Hope Trevor.

I was aghast, although the apparition was such as I might well have expected in that place, and should have been prepared to meet with conventional equanimity, but that I was not; I lost the sense of sight and sound, as regarded the stage, and sat with eyes fixed straight before me upon the enemy facing me down, until Miss Raleigh's attention was caught, and she whispered a warning to change my attitude, while bowing, herself, to Lady Di, who graciously, if slightly, recognised her at the same time. I took the hint, and restrained all signs of feeling until we met at closer quarters in the crush of exit, and Miss Raleigh took the opportunity of inviting the great lady to honor her next musical party, and, shock upon shock! gave as the inducement my first appearance as a musician in a London drawing-room, with a new song Miss Raleigh had written herself for me to set to a melody of my own. During the whole colloquy, I continued to stand pressed in the crowd at Miss Raleigh's side farthest away from Lady Di, of whose presence I assumed utter unconsciousness, until I was taken to task as we drove home.

‘Were you not acquainted with Lady Diana before?’ inquired my companion. ‘I did not know whether I ought to introduce you or not; you did not seem to put yourself in the way of making acquaintance.’

‘There was no necessity to do so; we had met before.’

‘You did not seem to remember each other.’

‘It was not my place to remember Lady Diana, unless she chose to remember me.’

‘How stiff and formal you are for so young a girl!’

‘I am not to be mean because I am young; Lady Diana knew me perfectly well, but she saw best to meet as strangers. It was not my fault—we had a kind of quarrel.’

‘Why, what a fool you were! Of all the silly things people do, the silliest is to quarrel; the trouble of it, going through the world! I never quarrel with any one, let people do what they will; if they are in the wrong, so much the worse for themselves. What have I to gain by taking offence?’

‘Well, nothing, I suppose, if the offender

is too far above you and the offence too deep to be complained of.'

'Ah, true! those are the worst kind of offences. What have you and Lady Diana done to one another?'

I was silent for a few minutes, and then came out a small part of the truth, to disguise the greater, unspeakable wrong: 'She made mischief for me with my grandmother, tried to make mischief and prevent me from playing Desdemona; she wanted to play it herself, to turn me out of the part in her own favor—I have done nothing to her.'

'Yes, you have; you have come in the way of her vanity—and I am sorry to say vanity is her fault—you are young, and have attractions to excite jealousy. Oh! that's a cruel feeling sometimes in women who are most admirable and good otherwise; I am sorry you should have found it so.'

'Miss Raleigh, you have invited Lady Diana to your party—I cannot be there to meet her.'

'No? I cannot have anything to do with anybody's quarrel, my dear; everyone

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meets everybody in my drawing-room. It is neutral ground.'

'Well, I must sit in some corner where I shall not be noticed; I will not sing.'

'Don't be so silly, my child; do you wish to let Lady Diana crush you out in a corner? She would ask no better, I dare say. Not sing? on the contrary, sing your best, and show her what you can do; don't quarrel, but never let those great people put you down—that's another matter.'

And so I took heart of grace to do and dare. The appointed evening came, and brought me the first taste of triumph my own earnest endeavors had wrung from toil and pain; it was not as once before, when I was lifted up and sat upon a pedestal—or pillory—as friends and enemies chose, by contact with Arthur, and swift extinction amidst the haze of his greatness; it was my own sole achievement now, this draught of the rich wine of life that set my heart afire. Oh, could he see me—oh, could he hear me! as the light of the Eastern harem, bright, young Nourmahal won back her offended lord, should I compel again his old, unforgotten love by

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the wondrous gifts and magic spells of song !

A power had risen within me, so that others felt with me as I would have them feel ; with every note that fell upon their hearts, a little of the pain was lifted off my own. ‘How true !’ cried one. ‘What a reality in that grief of a betrayed woman ! what a genius to express it all in music ! Such a young creature, too ! what can she know of such feelings ?’

Alas, too much ! by the wound in my own breast had I learned to sing of another’s woe. This was the secret of my power, at which the world was now to make its marvel.

I sat down in silence, while the two large rooms opening into one another were filled with the hum of two hundred voices, swelling the sound of praises showered on me, like a gentle rain from heaven, to bid the undying seed of hope grow again in the bruised spirit. There was a hush, and then a stir ; the close crowd swayed open across the principal entrance, as the name of Lady Diana Hope Trevor was announced from beneath the staircase.

There was a certain fitness in her appearance upon the scene, where much of the surroundings told of past wealth and state in a long line of former inhabitants of the mansion, a grand old house in one of the oldest squares, long deserted by fashion, yet possessing all the requirements of life on the highest social scale ; the staircase which wound round the lofty hall was of marble, with richly carved oak balustrades. No rich pile covered the old steps now, but the echoes of past generations of dainty feet had left the stone almost fresh, and such as rank and beauty need not disdain to tread uncarpeted, at this present day ; nevertheless, it was on rare occasions that a dame so highly placed, both by her husband's military honors and her own fame as a queen of society, graced the company at the Misses Raleigh's, and doors flung open their double leaves to the widest expansion as she swept into the room, all in black, relieved with laces and broideries of white, and a slight sprinkling of diamonds. Good taste had subdued the splendour of her attire to some keeping with the modest garb of her hostess, but

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this simplicity of adornment could only add a lustre to her beauty. I never knew before how wondrously fair was this abhorred rival of mine, how young she looked for her years, what tints upon her skin of cream and carmine! There was no paint or any make up—that my keen eye of hatred could discern; she might have been five-and-twenty, but for the full outline of her tall figure, which told of middle life rather than youth—this, I had heard said, is an attraction to some men. She recalled to my mind another Diana, styled ‘of Poictiers,’ whose matchless face and form and hair of spun gold enslaved two generations of Kings of France, and endured, it is said, unfaded till sixty years—even then, the chronicler records, she was indescribably lovely; she always dressed in black and white, like this cunning woman now, who seemed to have found likewise some elixir of perpetual youth. Ay, there was another, too, I had read of:

‘A Venus rising from a sea of jet’—

Lucy, Countess of Carlisle, Strafford’s mistress and avenger, the betrayer of her

Queen, Henrietta Maria—here was a third  
in my vision of fair, pernicious women !

She had her share of admiration and flattery in that room ; she took it all like a queen, enthroned upon a huge old carven chair, in character with the house, while almost all the company stood, seats having to be turned out through press for space. She accepted the world's homage graciously and as of course, and I felt that I stood above her in my triumph that hour ! She could not command the heart to throb, the eye to weep, as I had done. Some gentlemen raised a petition to her to sing. She avoided compliance, which Miss Raleigh had too much tact to press.

'I seldom ask amateurs to sing,' she said to me; 'you are an exception. I consider you as an artist.'

How sweet those words were to me ! by them I knew that Lady Diana's most judicious friends would not advise her to provoke comparison with me ; I might be nobody in the table of precedence, but on nature's list, despite her beauty, my patent of nobility was higher than hers, my title, genius, the sovereignty of human hearts.

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I withdrew from her vicinity to surround myself with a group of composers, poets and artists, of whom I was now admitted as a companion on my own merits, and took no more thought for my scornful rival, as she swept by in another path than mine. Once or twice, through the rest of the evening, her name crossed my ear, coupled with 'India,' 'High appointment,' 'Going away just as the season is beginning,' and this vague rumor, together with the fever of my own triumph, kept me tossing in uneasy wakefulness, or dreaming in unrest of troubles to come, of bitter reproaches from Arthur turned unkind, until broad daylight flashed upon me the resolve to question whom I could find to tell me the worst that could be told me. In the course of the day I found occasion to break the subject to Miss Raleigh.

'Lady Diana Hope Trevor is taking her husband to India,' I said. 'Does he know, do you think, what brings her there?'

'What brings her there? Why, her husband's appointment; what else? She is not the woman to break up her London season without good cause.'

‘Good cause! Do you not know, Miss Raleigh, have you not heard, how she follows Arthur everywhere, from east to west? and——’

‘My dear, I never believe any part of what the world’s malice invents of all great people; it is enough to be set upon a pedestal and have all their weaknesses of humanity held up to the light, without worse being added on.’

‘You believe there is no harm between them?’

‘No harm! I believe we owe the preservation of our Indian Empire to that woman’s influence through her husband, and the opportunity that was thrown open to the right man at the right moment, all through her.’

‘She has been much blamed, nevertheless, and I hear in India no one believes her to be a virtuous woman.’

‘India is a bad school: their way of life is such that almost every woman has her character compromised who lives long there.’

‘Indeed! then you do not defend her life?’

' It may have been an unsatisfactory one in some respects ; it is a misfortune to any of us to love our own will too much, and to have it, as she has had it, indulged by her husband in every whim ; but with all her worldliness and vanity, I believe there is much good in her. I know she is generous to a fault. I believe she is a pure, dutiful wife. There can be no question as to her love of her country, and what she has done to serve England, both by her husband's and Arthur's means.'

' It is fortunate that Arthur has no wife.'

' Why do you say so ?'

' Because his wife, if he had one, might be less complaisant than Sir John Hope Trevor in this case. Arthur's wife might believe—'

' Yes, if she were a jealous woman—what will not a jealous wife believe ? Heaven defend him, poor man, from such a plague as that ! he deserves better.'

Good Charlotte Raleigh ! How I loved her for taking Arthur's part against my evil thinking ! Deserve what he would, it was borne in upon me with the strong faith of conviction, that if ever Arthur should marry,

come what might, he would have me only for his wife, or none. This was comfort, even though we might never meet again. Twelve months had melted away from the first day of my great sorrow, and found me able to bear it better, though to forget it never ; and this because—

‘In sweet music is such art,  
Killing care and grief of heart  
Fall asleep, or hearing, die.’”



## CHAPTER III.

### MUSIC HATH CHARMS.

My first London season closed with a pleasant sense upon my mind of having found many well-wishers, and friends happily a few, among the distinguished and cultivated circles where Miss Charlotte Raleigh's literary pre-eminence gave access, along with herself, to a young aspirant under her wing. I left town for the long vacation as somebody, in a small way—having made my *début* in society as nobody whatever; this was something for a girl in her teens to have achieved in a few months.

I was to return home to dear old Grannie for the interval imposed between July and the autumn sessions of the Royal Academy

of Music. I doubted not that with as hearty good-will as she had predicted my failure, she would exult in the falsification of her own prophecies by the commencement of success I had won, despite all her provoking ways of throwing wet blankets, always conveniently at hand, whenever the least spark of enthusiasm dared to fly upward — except in politics, she being herself a partisan always at red heat on all Tory interests, the only ends she seemed to think worth living for ; my chances of marrying according to that traditional line of policy being included within her narrow vision of the world's future.

I was not to travel alone, but in harmony with Miss Raleigh's instincts as the mistress of a ladies' school, under her own charge, she having invitations to more than one country mansion in the west of England, through daughters who had passed as pupils through her hands, and who were invariably the better for it as women, whatever learning and accomplishments they might have gained or missed, so that to have been taught by her was to become her friend. I felt I was not without my share

of her good influence infused into the hot, impatient temper that was born in my veins.

My grandmother's reception of me was tender beyond my belief in her capacity in that way ; she kissed me as no one had ever kissed me since the time I was a child, and my father lived, and to her I felt kinder than I had ever yet done ; even the whole of Stormouth and its people I looked upon with different eyes, since I was no longer chained to their ways and customs, and so did they to me. A girl who has spent several months in the 'Kingdom come' of snubbed and snuffed-out provincial young ladyhood, and is bound on her return voyage to that same Cape of Good Hope, need trouble herself little for the mysterious hints and strictures of the ubiquitous 'they say,' and is able to treat on friendly terms, *de puissance en puissance*, with her old opponent, Mrs. Grundy. My position in London was demonstrated beyond a question by the mention of my name on several occasions as an ornament of musical circles ; even my late critic, the *Empress*, had been fain to follow the lead,

and damn me with faint praise, not altogether out of keeping with the encomiums of her masculine contemporaries.

Clergymen's ladies called upon me, with a view to charity bazaars and concerts, and I was not averse to putting my talents to some good use at their request. This, too, made my sojourn in the country pleasant and satisfactory, not, as it were, so much time cut out of my life and wasted, as formerly it seemed to me. I began to see, moreover, that my grandmother's life was one of great self-denial, through narrow means, or should I say poverty? to one of her habits, formed when she was at the head of as many thousands a year as she could now dispose of hundreds. I knew that in dividing her income to enable me to live in London, she made a sacrifice from which it was my duty to relieve her; and if this could not be, as she wished, by marriage, it must be by making music my profession as well as my delight, and in this resolution I was confirmed by every argument she used to dissuade me from it. I had now lived with those who worked for their bread, and known their kindness to a

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struggling, obscure girl, much better to me than the cold civility and quiet crushing out which was all I could win from the 'county set' of whom I was born, but among whom I could not be allowed to live, lacking money and connection.

In October I left Stormouth behind me, and returned to work with right good-will amongst my friends at the Royal Academy of Music, hoping to earn a prize such as should lighten the burthen imposed on my kind grandmother for my advancement. This project, as I knew she would disapprove, I kept secret from her; but I had no mind to be kept like the produce of her apple orchard, garnered in a loft, to rust in ripeness, because to sell the fruit would have involved loss of caste, although the price was very much needed to supply various little expenses, the want of which made life very dry and rigid to poor Grannie. Had she sold the apples, she would have indulged in the luxury of giving away indiscriminately to beggars, in denying whom she denied herself still more. Poor dear unreasoning, generous soul!

The desired object seemed close within.

my reach, to be attained at the next competition ; as a vocalist, it would have been affectation in me to make any doubt that I was first in the Academy ; as a proficient in musical science and composition, my claims were not mean : one ordeal to pass, and I should enjoy that first money earned by self-exertion, not received as a gift, which brings with it so satisfactory a sense of independence to be honorably earned, and tastes so sweet as the fruit of our own labor. In another month I was to go in for the prize, and win, if it pleased God.

It did not please man, nor did the course of the harmonious institution to which I had affiliated myself coincide at all with the decrees of that other whose chains the free-born British subject is wont to rivet upon himself, to the enslavement of body, soul, and will—the Court of Chancery, that grim abode of everlasting law, which those who enter must leave not only hope, but the option of their own mode of torment behind them ; where the usages of the Star Chamber, and the illegal practices of the rack and thumbscrew remain morally in full

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force, by way of proof of the venerable antiquity of that ‘glorious uncertainty,’ which, as the chief boast of the lawyers of England, has flourished in abuse, defying all reform, proving too strong even for the iron hand of the great Protector. In one word, I was recalled home by a summons from my grandmother to the effect that I was a great heiress, all the land remaining to our family having come to her by descent, through the death of a distant relation, I being the ‘last in remainder,’ a phrase in her letter which I did not understand, but it was clear enough that I was called away from the course I had chosen for myself to follow hers.

Heaven forgive me my first glow of exultation ! I am ashamed of the high thoughts of myself that swelled my budding pride, being lifted up by fortune as much above my fellow-students as my natural gifts—far better, had I but known—had already set me before others, by persevering labor : yet, I must own, I felt a great joy at being so placed by fortune, as I fondly flattered myself, to secure in my early years such fame and reward for my work as

poorer, humbler aspirants must toil a life long to achieve. I could command success, I thought, not alone by merit, but by rank and wealth as well, and more than all, I should now be nearer Arthur's equal.

Folly most rank and ignorance supreme ! The inheritance devolved in this wise. On my father's death, leaving only a daughter, the entailed estates passed to the next male heir, who derived through another branch, in the female line, and by a queerer derision of fate, happened to be an idiot, and as such, subject to the guardianship of the Court of Chancery, both as to purse and person. The latter was fairly cared for, in a private asylum of the select and expensive sort ; the former, as represented by the hereditary estates, were, by no figure of speech, swallowed up in expenses of law and management, with the exception of about one-fourth, which was all that, in fact, came into my grandmother's possession, although, subject to heavy mortgages, she nominally inherited about half of the whole, the other half having been sold from time to time, by order of the court, to defray the 'necessary expenses.' An old will secured

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the remnant of the property to Mrs. Fortescue for life, and to me as her successor, coming into force on the extinction of the entail by the idiot's death.

The immediate effect to me of this wind of fortune's favor was to quash my prospects of Royal Academy honors, and turn my feet into paths I never thought to have trod again. I came home and found a change. I was now a 'good match' for any gentleman in the county, my grandmother told me, and furthermore declared it was the first duty of my life, and of paramount necessity, that I should give up every other desire and aim in the world but the one great object—marriage; the existence of the family required it, I being the last of our particular branch of the Fortescues, and it was a most happy circumstance, she said, that I was now raised to a position to 'pick and choose,' just as I was eighteen; so I was to marry whom I would—but marry I must, or be without excuse hereafter as an old maid and failure in life.

Alas, it was too true that fate had brought me to the water, but with embittered lips

that could never taste anew of the well-spring of deep love ! Whether for my own sake, or for the broad lands that one day should be mine—that day, the present, if needs were, I believe my grandmother would have given up all to any man who could have been engrafted like a fresh sprout upon the decaying family tree—for this, or whatever cause, I was sought and wooed in that fair western land beloved of King Charles, as never maiden was wooed and left unwon, unwedded, and not understood. Being without excuse, I made none but that of wedded Juliet, ‘I cannot marry yet.’ Then I was asked to name my time, were it months or years, and on my promise hope would wait. I could not promise, and so I put away from me youth, and love, and joy of life—all for the sake of one whom I hoped not, scarce could wish, to meet again ; but an echo of his ever-remembered voice, a memory of his fond little ways, thrilled through me still, in every touch of a caress, repelled as soon as offered, because I could suffer none such of living man but him—my only love.

Could I change the plan of life I had

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formed, fall away from my devotion to the sweet art that had made existence a thing to be endured if not enjoyed, music, whose charms alone could win me back from the land of dark shadow where my earthly hope had perished ? I walked out alone into a deep wood, upon our lately inherited domain, to resolve this question with myself : could I live to please the world, a believer in its divinity, Grundy, the Bona Dea of British matronhood ? Could I be conformed to this, because the only creature left to love me, my dead father's mother, in her blind desire for my happiness, would have it so ? I felt like a stone knock against my heart, and there and then I chose my course and fixed my own fate, as every mortal has the right, under God, to do ; henceforward, music should be my comforter, my all the world, and if every hope, every desire I had ever cherished must fail me, as human events do fail and fall short of human designs, why then, in music like a dying fall, my youth's fair promise should fade away and die !



## CHAPTER IV.

UNA VOCE POCO FA.

By various arguments and caresses, I gained upon my grandmother a half consent to spend the spring with me in London ; she flattering herself that my great offence, ‘hard to please,’ would yield as a stumbling-block overthrown to the suit of some more congenial wooer than could be furnished by county ball or country side, I bent on rising to such pre-eminence and fame, through the gifts of nature and the toil of brain and tuneful throat rather than hand, as should put to silence every carping censor or misguided friend fain to make my days tedious with advice to be as other women, cut out after one pattern of the world’s choosing, rather than in the fashion

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designed for me by the Great Maker, who never repeated the same creation twice, and by whose variety of adornment this earth was made so fair. That I should differ in any point of mental or moral measurement from her own standard, 'when I was a girl,' as her phrase was, seemed a problem to my grandmother as insoluble as the Bridge of Asses, or 'algebra,' her favourite expression for impossible riddles; nevertheless, it was within the scope of reason and propriety that we should, like other county people, spend some months of the year in town.

It was desirable we should do so, by way of counterpoise to the somewhat narrow scale of our country housekeeping, voted mean by servants and dependents used to the Court of Chancery's management *pro bono publico*. My grandmother's ideas were lavish, if she could, but the wherewithal was wanting to us; our seat, situated in a western county, not Cornwall, proved, on possession, a kind of gulf, yawning to absorb far larger means than ours. The mansion was of dimensions suitable to the original fortune of its possessors, and now

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in such repair as tenements usually exhibit under the Court of Chancery's fostering care—gardens and dependencies to match ; in fact, as my grandmother said, ‘Another fortune was wanted to keep up the old place.’ It behoved us, in French phrase, to ‘*Mettre du fumier sur nos terres*,’ a favourite expression amongst the match-making dowagers of old-fashioned France, which may be rendered Anglicè, marrying for the sake of the Peruvian guano most effectual in the restoration of decayed nobility, gold—the god of this world, to whom I so obstinately refused my worship, while Grannie boasted in our long descent of a strain of the best blood in Brittany, the most bigoted to preconceived ideas in all France, or England either. ‘Well, there is no forcing little dogs to eat mutton,’ was her dissatisfied conclusion with me.

We were bound by our position to have a house of our own, a tiny furnished one ‘for the season,’ dropped down amongst the grand old mansions of St. Iago’s Square ; in point of locality, at least, unexceptionable, for the rest—the less said the better. Whether the narrow dimen-

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sions of our abode had anything to do with that of our reception into ‘society,’ I cannot vouch for ; certain it is that, to Grannie’s amazement, we were coldly shut out by Mayfair, and Belgravia knew us not : London was not the London of twenty years before, and Mrs. Fortescue’s cards were neglected by the representatives of her old friends, dead and gone, or, when they chanced upon some old houses still inhabited by their guests of a generation gone by, were returned with due politeness of a similar tale of cards, or, at most, a personal call from some old lady as far behind the stream of the present time as my grandmother herself. With Miss Raleigh’s set I was forbidden to identify myself, because as a schoolmistress she could not, according to Grannie, associate with the great world except on the terms of an inferior ; still less must I hold companionship with any friends of the Royal Academy, for fear of losing caste, and disqualifying myself for admission amongst my own class. The upshot of the matter was, we found ourselves, in the height of the London season, to all intents and purposes as much alone

as if we had been planted down in the middle of Puffin Island or Salisbury Plain.

In this predicament we received a call from an acquaintance, if not friend, of old standing in Stormouth, one Miss Hester Jane Cross, the same who formerly took offence at the unseemly predominance of my voice in church ; but now her lips seemed actually overflowing with the milk of human kindness to us both. A change had been discernible in her after my first season in London, when she asked me to sing at a charity concert : something of the kind, I suppose, was required for a paying public, who might not care to be put off, during a whole evening, even with high class incompetence. Miss Cross had come up to town on a short visit to Captain and Mrs. Dodd—county people ; did we know them ? We did not. Miss Cross would have great pleasure in bringing us acquainted with them, or any other friends of hers whom we might like to know. Had we many friends in town ? We could not make it appear that we had, of the right set ; everything depended on getting into the right set, and the outcome of it all was,

Miss Cross could procure us an introduction to the right set—and an eligible husband for me besides, upon consideration of being received into our miniature town house, so as to prolong *ad libitum* the London season for her own behoof.

The bargain was struck, with eager delight on Grannie's part, with mere acquiescence on mine. However, I was not sorry to see something of London life from the upper aspect, and as to the threatened husband—why, I could give him the go by. The first palpable result of Miss Cross's removal to our house from Captain and Mrs. Dodd's, was an invitation to us to dine with that fashionable couple in exactly four weeks from the date upon the card.

Long before this interval had been got through, Grannie discovered that our guest was somewhat 'heavy on the hand,' and had got, moreover, thoroughly tired of the innumerable morning calls, involving long drives to all points within the metropolitan postal circle, absolutely required by Miss Cross as the preliminaries of our 'introduction into her circles.' The results to be

expected were a series of invitations for the post paschal 'London season,' Mrs. Dodd's party being first on the list. When we were all three dressed for the occasion, grandmother remarked to me, in an aside, how much better it was for a girl to go out with one chaperon only, than with two elderly women, our companion, she hinted, being a kind of burlesque upon us both. In truth, Miss Cross's long black corkscrews were not unlike a parody upon Grannie's daintily tricked out white hair, restrained in clusters about her forehead, while the make of her dress was as close a copy of mine as could be laced without bursting upon the figure of a damsel of thirty-nine; her appearance gave apprehension of cancer as the ultimate consequence of her reversing the fable of the frog and the bull.

On being presented to our hostess of the evening, I recognised a face I had seen before, and the impression was not pleasant. Again, Captain Dodd's voice sounded not unfamiliar, and, by degrees, I recognised them both as the couple who sat in front of us at the Stormouth Park theatricals,

and as I recovered the recollection of all I had overheard of their talk that memorable evening, I felt the less at ease as a guest at their table. However, there were companions enough to keep me in countenance, so I set myself to see and understand. The first object conspicuous to observation was our hostess's toilet. Her father having died within the past year, she wore an heiress's mourning of white satin, elaborated into endless folds and flounces of the rich material, interspersed with gauzes and black lace, and a slight sprinkling of jet; there had exhausted itself all the cunning of the Parisian master in the golden age of Eugénie; three bands of diamonds across each shoulder did duty for absent sleeves, and a profusion of these glittering riches helped to make the most that nature permitted of a model figure and plain face, the combination being not without a certain charm of piquancy. Looking round the house chosen as a casket to this gem of a woman, I was struck by the want of space compared with the overload of costly decoration and furniture heaped into every

available nook and corner; my eyes had yet to be educated to the overcrowded magnificence of a Mayfair drawing-room.

I was handed down to dinner by a gentleman of uncertain age, from thirty to forty, introduced as Mr. Elliot, answering, moreover, to the name of Horatio, as I learned on farther acquaintance. While we were hedged together, in a sharp corner of the stone staircase, no doubt contrived to that effect by the architect, I discerned a peculiarity in the hair of my cavalier, about the top of the head, and by the time we sat down at table, had drawn the conclusion that he wore a false crown to conceal premature baldness. Not being personally interested, however, in the charms of the outward man, my ear gave place to those of his conversation, which was diverting and mildly scandalous, as became a professed ladies' man.

Soup and fish disposed of, he gently chid me for failing to keep him in countenance as to the crowd of elaborate dishes, inconceivable in their substances, the half of which, barely tasted, would have made me sick for a week. 'Oh, never mind that!

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eat, eat, and die! it's so nice,' he ex-postulated, helping himself to dainty after dainty. 'I never eat lunch when I dine here : no one gives such a dinner as Stanley Dodd ; everything but a mouthful of fresh air—not a breath of that.'

'I saw the servants shut up both windows as we came in—how was that ?'

'Mrs. Dodd has a bad tooth and won't have it drawn—she calls it neuralgia, but it's toothache she's afraid of, and so we must be shut up in a space like the black hole in Calcutta. The notion of putting eight-and-twenty people to dine in a little room like this! Why, sixteen would be a cram ; I don't see the joke, do you ?'

'Not quite—I want a great deal of air to breathe.'

'You live upon air, like the chameleon, eh ? It seems to agree with you, by the charming rotundity—'

I felt my face burn at the hint or the glance that fell—yet surely my square cut bodice should not provoke such comment on what it concealed, while the row of uncovered busts which adorned that epicurean table were exempt.

‘Who says no roses can stand London air?’ proceeded my companion’s running commentary; ‘I can bear witness to the contrary.’

‘And so can I,’ was my answer, daring out my conscious blush with an attempt at boldness; ‘I know the stronger kind of roses will live in town.’

‘Nay, the most delicate of all.’

‘Cabbage roses.’

‘No, Devonshire roses—cheek roses, that’s Shakespeare’s phrase. Don’t you think it pretty?’

He whispered close to the cheek he flattered, until I drew away, and to turn the subject, I glanced towards our hostess, saying, ‘What beautiful diamonds Mrs. Dodd wears.’

‘You may say that. I never saw her without them.’

‘What! Never?’

‘They say she sleeps in them; I can quite believe it.’

‘You don’t admire diamonds?’

‘Only on pretty women, where one so seldom sees them. Diamonds on an ugly woman are a mistake.’

'Well, Mrs. Dodd's are very fine diamonds, and no mistake in that,' I said, laughing off my little malice in the observation.

'She has fine diamonds, and so she ought.'

'Why ought she more than any other lady?'

'Why, don't you know who she was?'

'Before she married Captain Dodd, do you mean? I have heard she was a great heiress.'

'Quite true; only, perhaps, I ought not to tell—'

'Do tell, then.'

'You must not ask me.'

'Don't tell, then, unless you like it best.'

'Well, I'll tell *you*. Her father was the famous Mr. Goldie.'

'Do you mean the great jeweller?'

'Oh, you put it charitably. The collateral branch of the family tree, with the crest, three balls, if you know what that means?'

'I don't.'

'A pawnbroker,' and he dropped his

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voice down to my particular ear ; 'she has about fifty thousand pounds' worth of jewels, and as to her dress, nobody knows what that costs, but she can't display her magnificence at Court.'

'She cannot ! indeed ?'

'She doesn't dare to risk it. But she'll tell you a long story of the Lord Chamberlain calling upon her to say her Majesty was surprised at not seeing her, and how his lordship gave her his advice to appear at Court, but that, indeed, she does not care to be presented. Don't you believe one word of it, but mind you pretend you do, or you'll get me into a scrape.'

At this point there was some disturbance of the order of the banquet, through the arrival of a guest, out of all conscience belated ; but the Stanley Dodds never waited for anyone. This was a lady, aged, overborne with dress, and with difficulty able to walk, as she came along, her footman's arm being only admissible so far as the outer hall. When her name was announced, Captain Dodd called upon an elderly gentleman at the table, saying, 'Mr. Harcourt, you're a man of gallantry,

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will you have the goodness to fetch Lady Cameron in?"

'Heavy duty for Harcourt,' commented Mr. Elliot; 'it's rather hard lines to bring poor old Lady Cameron out, unsupported by her lady companion; but—no toadies admitted is the rule of this house, no room for extra crinolines round this table—only one lady to each invitation.'

'We came three ladies in a party.'

'Then that's an exception; you are specially ornamental, to carry so much dead weight along with you.'

Soup and fish being recalled on Lady Cameron's behoof, a certain breach ensued in the course of the banquet, filled up by the starting of an extraneous topic of debate; none other than a change in Sir John Hope Trevor's position in India, whereby it appeared he was brought into proximity with Arthur, their respective posts having hitherto kept them apart. A peculiar sense seemed attached to the circumstance, by general consent of the company, implied though not expressed in words; until Lady Cameron chose to make

herself the spokeswoman of the common malicious intention.

'Well!' she said, 'Lady Di is in her element, and in all her glory now; promoting her husband's advancement like a good wife, so that Sir John can't do less than acknowledge the privileges of a *cavaliere servente*. Oh, they think nothing of those things abroad; I've seen the same little arrangement over and over again—it seems to promote the general harmony of society.'

'A greasing of the wheels of the matrimonial car,' put in Mr. Harcourt, following up the tongue-thrust with a meaning laugh. 'Arthur's the ladies' hero: that fellow will go on breaking hearts till he sets one foot in his grave.'

My spirit rose in anger, such as once or twice only in my life had held mastery over me: when it did, my Indian blood was prone to spurn the faint barriers of prudence, or custom of society. Striving with my passion, I broke in with a reply wide of the mark.

'Lady Diana, I should think, ought to

make her husband her hero. Sir John Hope Trevor is a brave man too.'

'Deserving the fair, and no doubt loved by his wife too—in her way : she's a large-hearted woman, and he can't complain of bad company in that quarter,' sneered Mr. Harcourt : my fierce looks answering, he paused : 'Now, young lady, never shake your charming locks at me ; I'm not a hero worshipper, and men are men, and will be, till the end of the world.'

'It is false—false of him, of Arthur; I do not believe it—no, not a word !'

'Is she not charming in her *naïveté*?' put in Mr. Elliot, as my *preux chevalier*.

'Irresistibly bewitching ; it's worth a man's while to slip off the hooks for the sake of being defended like that. She thinks her hero a Joseph—ha, ha, ha ! Friend Arthur is not being led astray for the first time !'

'I've heard they ran away together before her marriage,' hinted Lady Cameron ; 'but they were pursued and brought back a little too late, they do say ; but these things can be hushed up in India. I think they should have been allowed to marry

after going so far, it was not fair to Sir John afterwards ; I suppose he did not know what he was doing until after he was netted and noosed ; who could have thought Arthur would turn out the best match after all ? Well it may come round again, if ever Lady Di is a widow ; friends meet, though hills do not.'

I burst into tears of rage, hardly to be checked by Grannie's agonised looks of reproof across the table. 'I cannot believe such stories,' I cried out; 'I am ashamed to hear them of a man who ought to be the pride of everyone of us English born ; I have heard of such calumnies before, but never the slightest proof ; he of all the world should be held innocent, unless some dishonorable act be proved against him, but this no enemy ever yet could do !'

Silence fell upon the table, broken only by the master of the house, with hospitable skill, turning attention to the details of the menu, with some hints to Lady Cameron as to the best epicurean combination at her choice, seeing she declared her doctor strictly limited her as to the

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pleasures of the *gourmet*. No further allusion was made to my rival or to my lover, so long as I was present, in that house, ever again.

Whatever doubt might remain as to the degree of social sin by me committed in this first instance, there could be no two opinions as to the enormity perpetrated by my little person, as *enfant terrible*, later on. The evil quarter-of-an-hour imposed on the feminine element according to the law of post-prandial banishment to the drawing-room, was, I could see, improved by Miss Cross, to my detriment, with Grannie, who, if not herself fully awake to the impropriety of my championing my hero after my own fashion, would be taught to suspect me for ever after of some folly or other on his account ; this injurious proceeding being happily interrupted by the dropping in of gentlemen, one after another, risen from the table, the piano was opened, and music was the order of the evening. Now was my time to sing down all malice, thought I ; but I reckoned without my hostess.

This lady, much cried up by her friends

as an amateur of first-rate vocal execution, opened the concert with a correct rendering of 'Robert, toi que j'aime,' carefully toned down as to expression, so that the highly dramatic movement of the music and words should in no way clash with drawing-room conventionality, half-an-hour after dinner.

This effort duly belauded, another lady *virtuosa* followed with twenty minutes of digital gymnastics, as usually administered for the promotion of loud conversation and general hilarity at evening gatherings of the lesser world of fashion, whose programme does not aspire to professional entertainment. Finally, I was asked to sing, and *malgré* Grannie's dissuasions, I did it.

I sat down to the piano, determined to show what music meant, if there were ears that could understand. The instrument, rich in elaborate decoration, gave a sound that reminded me of a cabbage stalk, if any analogy there be between the sense of taste and hearing. No matter; I could sing accompanied or alone. Opera *scenæ* in a small room are always to me ridicu-

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lous, as burlesque of the mock sublime stamp. I chose a Tuscan melody, the lament of a forsaken lover.

‘Ti ho scritto tante volte inutilmente,  
E sempre in vano attendo la risposta ;  
Dimmi pur che ti sono indifferente,  
Ma scrive per pieta : cosa ti costa ?’

And in these words I sang out all the hidden pain about my heart till the sharp pang writ itself upon my brow. I rose, and there was silence in the room for several moments—silence intense as while I sang, but no sound of comment followed. One gentleman only, an amateur composer, as I learned afterwards, came up, and planted himself behind my chair for the rest of the evening, fraternising with me, and hinting how much my music was thrown away upon such an audience, finally quoting Beau Brummel’s dictum : ‘That no English society, except the best, is worth going into.’ Evidently, I was not in the best for me.

All the way driving home, while Miss Hester Jane chattered, Grannie never opened her lips, an evil sign for my peace.

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She came to my room, and for half-an-hour loaded me with reproaches. First for drawing the eyes of the world upon me about Arthur, whose conduct to myself I ought to be only too happy to conceal, while his public delinquency in taking promotion from a Whig Government was of a piece with the scandal of his private life; next she made her moan over my singing, like a lovesick fool of a heroine of romance, such a song as no girl ought to be heard to sing; furthermore, I sang it like a public singer, instead of confining my voice and style within amateur limits. Worse than this, I had acted most imprudently in provoking contrasts between myself and the lady of the house, to her disadvantage, as she might think, and never invite us again. Finally, I had driven away Mr. Elliot by the exhibition, inasmuch as men do not like a girl who draws remarks, and I was doing everything, she predicted, most fatal to my chance of making a good berth for myself in the world, according to my bounden duty. If I doomed myself to old maidism, what

good would it do me to sing? Until I was married first, I had best not sing at all! This was her ultimate command. *Ay de mi! ay de mi!*



## CHAPTER V.

### WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

‘Il n’y a pas de raison qui explique l’amour,  
Il y en a beaucoup qui expliquent le mariage.’

‘WHAT doleful ditty was that you sang last night?’ Miss Cross questioned me, at breakfast, next day: ‘was it your own?’

‘No, I wish it were ; it was only a Tuscan song.’

‘Don’t you think Leila makes a bad choice of songs? Something light and lively is what pleases the men ; that sweet thing in the new opera bouffe, for instance.’

Be it noted, in form of parenthesis, that Miss Cross had conscientious scruples as to entering any theatre, except where Italian

opera was given ; consequently knew nothing of what she was talking about, to the intensification of my disgust.

' I object to sing opera bouffe songs,' I replied, 'such as are eschewed by all singers of repute.'

' I did not know, I'm not in the way of knowing, what public singers do ; but at least you should never sing any of your own compositions ; do now, like a sensible girl, till after you're married, give up composing.'

Give up breathing and live, would have been easier to accomplish. And of marrying and giving in marriage Miss Cross's head was full, to the destruction of my peace ; to keep her ground in the house, it seemed to me, she worked up Grannie to a chronic boiling point of expectation, which involved for me perpetual hot water, instead of the quiet, negative kindness, to which I had been used from a child.

' You must make it your business to please Mr. Elliot,' Miss Cross would lay down the law ; ' you want a position, and that he has. I don't know whether he has any money—his lawyers and your lawyers

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will find out all about that ; or, you may do better yet, if—'

If I allowed myself to be drilled into everything that was most intolerable.

It is hard lines for the caged songster, when his voice happens to displease some untuneful ear, who, to check the loud noise of his throat-music, throws a cover over his cage, dooming the unhappy bird to darkness as well as captivity ; should some visitor with a soul for music unlock his bars, and set the prisoner free, without leave asked of his owners, who shall blame the deliverer, still less the bird ?

Just so it happened that Mr. Frederic Mowbray, the musical *dilettante* who had fraternised with me at Mrs. Dodd's, called upon me to propose that I should sing at a concert given in aid of a charity at St. James's Hall. As several titled ladies were included in the programme, I was able to extort from Grannie an unwilling consent ; otherwise, I frankly own, I should have behaved no better than the runaway bird to which I have compared myself.

The concert was not to come off for a month, and in the meantime, we were in-

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vited to one of Lady Stormouth's parties, that is, Miss Cross and I, overweight in chaperons not being admissible; a slight which Grannie did not pass over, but kept in her mind against us, although she desired me to accept what might open a new door to matrimonial chances. I was struck, on entering the grandly proportioned rooms of the Stormouth town mansion, with something higher in the air and tone of all the surroundings than I had found in Mrs. Dodd's overcrowded collection of riches and intimates. In the ladies' *toilettes*, however costly, an absence of parade was noticeable, while most wore square-cut bodies, or lace covering their decent shoulders. Here was evidently the upper ten thousand at its best, interspersed with celebrities who have won their spurs by other proofs of merit than inheritance or mere wealth; the entertainment of the evening was a concert by professional singers, whom I envied much, for here was an audience worth singing to indeed!

We were met by my old friend Captain Pembridge of our county militia; he quitted

another gentleman to speak to us, whom at first I did not particularly notice, but while I was confiding to the captain some details of the St. James's Hall project, his friend came up, and asked to be presented to me.

'Allow me to introduce my friend, Colonel Barclay, Miss Fortescue,' said Captain Pembridge; adding, in a whisper to Miss Cross over my shoulder, 'Member for Little Britain, and lots of money,' a hint not lost upon my companion, nor, in an opposite sense, on me. I fear it served to conjure up in me the perverse little spright of feminine contradiction, that is not wont to lie long quiescent under provocation.

'Do you like these musical parties?' said the gallant legislator, by way of saying something, after looking at me as much as it is permitted to cats to look at kings.

I made answer with a 'Yes, rather,' equally devoid of meaning. Then he put a question.

'What was that you were talking about to Pembridge? I think I heard St. James's Hall. What was that about?'

‘Oh, a secret ! I’ll not tell it to a gentleman,’ I said, with a laugh.

‘Why not ? Ladies can’t keep secrets.’

‘Gentlemen can’t. No ; I shan’t tell you !’

‘I can keep a secret ; I’m a fair man, so you can trust me.’

‘No, I can’t ; fair and false.’

I hit him off, with a glance at his light brown curls. His hair was of the peculiar shade I call perfidious-colour in men, his age of the most delicate uncertainty, between forty and sixty ; but take him for all in all, a fine-looking man, not displeasing to most feminine eyes. Somehow, he hung about me, off and on, for the most part of the evening. During intervals I was made unpleasantly conspicuous by somewhat over-marked attentions on the part of Lord Stormouth, who, in the double capacity of host and elderly married man, took undue advantage of the situation. More than once I caught the eye of his lady, in Juno-like wrath, too well distinguishable by me, from past experience of what is to be expected of a jealous wife,

from any mere apprehensions that could be awakened in the noble matron's mind by the slight civilities to me of her sons, the Honourables Hubert and Augustus Robinson. Lord Exmoor, the heir, was known to be unassailable by any *damoiselle* of less degree than a duke's daughter, or peeress in her own right. The younger sons were bound by the maternal laws laid down for them not to derogate by alliance beneath the estate of earl's daughters; the nobility of the Robinson family tree being ungreat-grandfathered, it behoved the scions thereof to mate with older and higher rank in preference to blood of long descent without that title. Having myself some pride in this latter quality, I was fain to ignore the mild attentions of my lady's offspring, but failed so easily to elude the pursuit of her spouse. Thus beset, I cast about for a convenient opportunity to make my escape unperceived, before the concert was nearly over.

In a movement towards refreshments, which shook off my pursuer for the time, I caught a hold on Mr. Elliot's arm, and begged of him to help us into our carriage,

as I was tired and must go, but wished to avoid the appearance of retreat.

'Is that the trick you are up to?' jeered my cavalier, obeying my behest, and down the stairs we made our way in mid-stream set towards the supper-room, thence deviating in our course for the ladies' cloak room, drawing Miss Cross along with us, much against her will, which was bent for cold salmon, truffles, and champagne, and as much music as she could consume afterwards. Mr. Elliott had to appease and attend her in my interest, cloaking her carefully with her *sortie-de-bal*, of the description known to theatrical managers, as 'the free pass scarlet cloak.' Just as my white and gold Indian drapery was turned up from beneath a heap, in burst my lord, in huge vexation at my departure, which he chose to set down to the heat, laid hands on the web of Hindoostan, and, with much expressed admiration of the same, bestowed it daintily about my shoulders, to Mr. Elliot's giggling comment from the other side of the room :

'Lord Stormouth has taste—he has taste!' This was too much for my lady's

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own maid, who presided over the cloak-room attendants. She advanced with a fierce brow of reproach and scorn bent upon her lord, grasped the drapery from his hands, as Lady Macbeth might grasp the two daggers in the murder scene, and then, with lofty courtesy, arranged my scarf scientifically for the carriage home. Outside the door stood Colonel Barclay, looking out for me, grave and quiet, having abstained from any invasion of woman's rights in the ancillary department; he did duty, nevertheless, in handing me into the carriage, and in a tone of earnest seriousness, said he would call upon me the next day. He was not as good as his word, but, in a couple of days, Mrs. Pembridge, the militia captain's lady, came to supply his deficiency, with much enlargement upon his general merits as an *épouseur*, enhanced by his decided admiration for myself. He was wealthy beyond ordinary computation, had 'more money than he knew what to do with,' was Member of Parliament for a metropolitan constituency in the Liberal interest. Liberal? well, no, not exactly Conservative; at least, he would be a Tory if

he could, but had to please his constituents, or rather, not to put too fine a point upon it, he was Radical Member for a specially democratic borough in the East-End, and officially pledged to the subversion of the British Constitution as by law established in Church and State. Only Grannie seemed disposed to set down every rich man as a Tory by necessity. Furthermore, he was master of a City Company, and Colonel of a regiment of Volunteers, but—as a self-made man—he wanted birth and blood rather than money with his wife. His particular preference, I was assured, had fallen on me.

‘If so, why did he not keep his promise to call?’ I inquired, always prone to fight shy of vicarious love-making.

‘He has no time—what with Parliament, and all his engagements of every kind, the poor man has not a moment to himself; but I’m to invite you down to Brighton for a cruise in his yacht. You’ll come with me and Captain Pembridge?’ I was pressed to accept, although apprehensive myself as to the propriety of the step, Mrs. Pembridge urging, ‘Oh, you’ll be all

right, as I shall be with you,' Grannie and Miss Cross joining in chorus, although the latter, at least, was bridling up in disgust at the omission towards herself on the part of the colonel. 'I am appointed sole chaperon on board,' said Mrs. Pembridge: 'none but young ladies and young men, or unmarried men, at least, who want to make up for lost time, are to be of the party.'

Finally, I was brought to accept.

Two years had now gone by since I and Arthur parted; no word had passed between us since that day. Surely he cared not for me, and the mention of him brought me disgrace, even though my bosom still held close the terrible secret of my love; I had no permanent home in Grannie's house, unless I could change my nature at her bidding; she would never again come to London, she said, to be driven about by Miss Cross, and thwarted by that troublesome inmate as to dinner-hour, and every other habit of life; neither could Grannie stand the wear and tear herself of going out with me, so that the case resumed itself into this conclusion: we could not live in London with Miss Cross

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any more than we could get on there without her, and, this being so, Grannie vowed that, as in two years I should be one-and-twenty, she would then wash her hands of the care of me, clear and clean !

I might stay in London without her, and resume my artist life. Here a host of difficulties met me : I was now presented in society as a young lady of presumed fortune and fashion, and, although not able to treat with the world on equal terms, I was so far disqualified as a competitor for honors reserved to those whose talents are their bread. Had I better marry ? This was the question now.

Here was an honorable man, said to love me, able to raise me, as his wife, above the malice of the world, willing, perhaps, to give full scope to those talents which, in my maiden state, were little else than a reproach to me to possess. Would he so far enter into my views ? and if so, for the sake of the untrammelled use of the gifts that were within me, ought I not to accept his protection ? To reject him might be to offend past forgiveness against fate ; as the lesser evil, it might behove me to take this

man for a husband. Into this favorable mood towards Colonel Barclay's suit I was reasoning myself all the way down to Brighton.



## CHAPTER VI.

### MY PRETTY MAID.

'Good Master Shallow, let him woo for himself.'—  
*Merry Wives of Windsor.*

THE *Dione* lay upon the laughing waters, basking in the hot sun that, with due intervals of drip and hurricane, affects the cliffs and parade of Brighton from June till November: like a gem set in crystal lay the *Dione* on the silver sea. How she came by her name, the chronicler sayeth not; surely her owner and captain was no Grecian, though, like the Eastern poet who was not the rose, he might boast he had lived in the society of such sprigs of erudition as Oxford and Cambridge can turn out of ductile material, as furnished by the gilded youth of the period.

I was conveyed on board in a boat, with Captain and Mrs. Pembridge and her daughter Annie, a girl about my own age, whose admirer, Mr. Dowbiggan, kept Colonel Barclay in countenance on board his dainty craft, in waiting to receive us.

No one was of the party who could interrupt, or make diversion to the smooth course of love, true or otherwise, which lay open to the colonel.

He was not quite a sea captain, any more than he was a field officer, in the professional sense, which my military parentage and early associations predisposed me to attach to such titles : as an amateur sailor, he was favoured by weather and entire absence of wind, in making his luxuriously appointed yacht as pleasant a lounge and flirtation ground for the favored few of his guests as any Belgravian mansion, with glassed balconies, could afford on mellow nights in June to a bachelor and his fair ; while here his suit could suffer no interruption of impertinent rivals ready to combine with me in crossing the exclusive and particular game of my adorer.

Not but what I was 'too many' for him

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in my own little person, wicked even beyond the wont of young damsels in his case. The broad daylight and my sharp eyes betrayed the dearest secrets of his *toilette*, even to the dye that variegated the auburn hue of his locks, and the incipient baldness that lurked beneath their clusters, to the size of a crown piece at least. His beard was blent with glints of orange, a not uncommon defect in the masculine blond ; by-and-by the small places in the inner man left void by niggardly nature, where a heart is supposed to lodge, and the milk of human kindness to be secreted, were laid bare to my curious investigation. Our first private conversation gave occasion to discuss Miss Cross, who had inspired the colonel with singular aversion.

'I am afraid of Miss Cross,' he made confession to me ; 'she has contrived to thrust herself into very good society, in a kind of way—match-making is her vocation ; she gets invited into houses where there are daughters to marry, and makes them give dinner-parties to eligible bachelors. When one gets caught, she plants herself upon the young couple, or

the parents, as the case may be, on the strength of having got the husband to order ; at last she drives the obligation to such intolerable lengths, they have to turn her out : she's a woman I avoid myself, and I advise you to do the same, if you don't want to be married, whether you like it or not, before you can look about you.'

Here was a horrible disclosure as to what an inmate I had left behind me in town ! But I, assuming a laughter which the French call yellow, said, 'Thanks, I like to be forewarned ; that would never suit me.'

' We must both be careful what we do in that way ; mustn't we ?'

' Oh, certainly ; you especially, colonel. Perhaps Miss Cross had a mind to catch you herself ?'

I had hit the mark, and he gave consent by silence. According to Mrs. Pembridge, matters had gone so far that Miss Cross threatened to bring an action for breach of promise, which, as the colonel had not committed himself to go the full length of marriage, could not be sustained. In the parting quarrel, Miss

Cross told him to understand she did not care for him, except for the sake of his money. The colonel, it appeared, was apt, in a quiet, undemonstrative way, to get himself into dangerous collision with the weaker sex, from whose wiles a suitable marriage alone could afford him the required protection.

One lovely afternoon, at dinner-time, he was moved to dilate upon the qualities and dispositions he expected to find in a partner for life, as also upon his own premeditated deportment towards that lady ; I sitting eonscious, making believe not to understand, the rest of our party tittering and looking on at our play.

‘My wife,’ he ruled, ‘must have birth and beauty—I don’t want a doll who can do nothing but dress ; I want a companion, who can help me in Christian work among our friends and neighbours.’

‘That is very good,’ said I ; ‘but should you like her to make of dowdyism a virtue ?’

‘Oh no ! I don’t like that ; I think when ladies take to serious, good work,

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they should use their attractions to increase their influence in the cause.'

So far I was with him. He pursued :

' Only, not outside their own particular sphere, at home, with their husbands. When a woman is married, she should attract no notice from any other man ; she should do nothing to make herself conspicuous in public—my wife should not.'

' The Greek idea !' chimed in Captain Pembridge ; ' happy the woman who is least spoken of ! She should be like the violet that blooms in the shade, not seen, but perceived only by the fragrance of her secret life.'

' Not wasted, let us hope, on desert air,' said I, ' if she has a husband who can appreciate her ; but Colonel Barclay is for " rule a wife and have a wife ;" they did well that put the " rule " before the " have." I'm afraid you'll find her hard to rule, when you do have her ; bachelors' wives usually are, being the most put upon of any women living ; I'm afraid the bachelors will be punished some day for cruelty to their wives.'

' How can bachelors be cruel to their

wives ? they've got no wives,' said the matter-of-fact colonel, putting at once an extinguisher upon the blaze of wit and satire that threatened to scorch his fingers, so boldly he twitched its audacious wick in two, and snuffed me out like a candle !

' Colonel Barclay, I'm sure, will be kindness itself to his wife,' piped Mrs. Pembridge ; ' why, he's the kindest man ! such beautiful presents he brought me, all the way from Naples, on his last cruise—these corals. Look, my dear : you've always said you never saw me wear anything so becoming ! Captain Pembridge, my dear——' Thus the lady appealing to her husband ; the colonel interrupted :

' Now, that's a thing I should never think of doing—to call my wife dear ! It's all very well to children, but to one's wife it does seem so silly to me.'

' What would you call her, then ?' laughingly inquired the spirited dame. ' Find an answer to that.'

' Why, by her Christian name, unless it was too long, and then I'd cut it short ; what is your Christian name, Mrs. Pembridge ?'

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‘ My Christian name ? Marietta, to be sure ! ’

‘ Marietta ? that means a kind of a foreign Mary. I’d call you Polly—plain Polly, if you were my wife.’

‘ Polly ! I’m not your wife, colonel ; I should not allow my husband to call me Polly. Why, that’s what the police call the workhouse nurse. I hope your wife will have a prettier name ; Letitia, for instance, you could call her Lily, you know’—this with a side wink at me.

‘ I could,’ predicated the colonel, imper-  
turbable as the British type exists com-  
monly in the Gallic imagination ; looking  
neither to the right, nor to the left, nor yet  
in my direction, he exhibited the most per-  
fect suppression of opinion no less than  
emotion ; yet it was clearly conveyed to  
me that if such a man could be married,  
husband and wife would merge by  
inevitable course in one entity—the  
husband.

Next morning a complete change had  
come over wave and sky, and no less over  
the colonel’s face ; an indefinable whiteness  
overspread his features at breakfast—or

such part of them as his beard left visible—and he evinced a distaste for the strawberries and cream, confining his attentions to plain biscuit and coffee. This last was drunk by the company with sundry spills upon the carpet of the chief cabin, where our footing, steady at first as on firmest earth, was now becoming decidedly lively, so that we were forced to trip it, elderly and young, as the impolite waves danced up and down the ship's sides, and compelled a general closing of portholes, bringing down our allowance of air near to suffocating point, while a fine sea mist rendered the deck uncomfortable as a bed with damp sheets; the colonel proposed forthwith a general move to the Grand Hotel, which was carried *nem. con.*

Dinner under difficulties such as marred the enjoyment of the breakfast-hour was thus eluded, per *table d'hôte*, and we adjourned afterwards for post-prandial recreation and flirtation to a private drawing-room on the fifth floor. Annie Pembridge and her lover went up first in the lift, and I was gravely invited by the colonel to follow, but evaded his wish on

pretext of headache as the consequence, so we walked up the allotted flights of stairs, Mrs. Pembridge and her captain following, in connubial concord, affecting to keep back out of hearing of whatever the colonel and I had to say to each other. I paused, however, at each landing, until my too careless chaperon came round the last turn. ‘Come up,’ said the colonel, while I made a dead stop. He never could entice me out of eye-shot of the pair following our lead.

There was a balcony to our chamber in the heights, and said balcony looked down upon the sea, and upon the sea looked the moon, full, in all her beauty.

Let me be careful to remember faithfully as I write, so that no inadvertent lapse of mind shall mar the touching beauty of the story.

Mr. Dowbiggan and Annie, with souls beneath poetry, had retired into a corner of the room, to discuss a very early peach, brought with them from the yacht, which proved on eating to be unripe and sour. Their voices followed us, as did their elders’ eyes, the colonel leading the

way, I coming after, out upon the balcony.

The ‘dirty weather,’ which the colonel said threatened in the morning, still held off; no more than a pleasant sea-breeze was stirring the *Dione*, as she lay beneath our eyes, symbolising her owner’s wealth, and the power of wealth, rather than the mere use of enjoyment. His money had bought her, but it did not please him to inhabit her; she was part of the belongings of his station, like the constituency—‘free and independent,’ of course—who never debased themselves to finger a bribe, much as they affected a moneyed representative. Not without his weight in the House was the colonel either, though neither there nor elsewhere could he be called eloquent; now, however, he was come to a crisis in his fate, when a man must speak all his mind, or it looked very like it, if the indefinable indications by which men are wont to betray their undeclared intentions go for anything. I was conscious that the colonel would proceed, as best he could, to make love.

I was looking at the beauty of the clouds,

still aglow with the mingled crimson and violet of the sun's death-bed, and counting each particular star as one by one the eyes of the heaven were opened, and I said in my heart, 'When the glory of their light shall be quenched in the far eternity, yet my spirit shall not forget—' How long I knew not. I was almost unaware of my companion, until he broke the golden silence.

'I was engaged to be married once before,' he said. 'Yes, very long ago.'

The tone and emphasis conveyed that he considered himself an engaged man now, to the person he was speaking to. 'Once' sounded as if it meant once only. It had not yet been told to me that the matrimonial engagements he had entered upon and broken off should be counted rather, unless he was much belied, by the score.

'Yes, once before,' he reiterated.

'Then how came it you were never married to the lady?'

'She died; she had an estate—a very good estate—it brought in three thousand a year; she was an heiress, like you.'

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‘Not quite like me ; I shall not have more than half as much, even after Grannie.’

Silence again for a very long time.

‘Is not your grandmother very old?’

‘About seventy, I should think ; I do not know her age.’

‘Is she not very infirm, very feeble in health?’

‘I have never known her to be ill ; I think she is stronger than I.’

‘I think she looks very infirm.’

‘You have seen her, then, to judge of that? I did not know that you had ever met.’

‘I saw her get out of her carriage, that was all.’

‘You saw her at a disadvantage ; she is weak on her feet from gout ; they say that is what is the matter with her, but she has no pain to speak of ; her father lived to be ninety, I have heard. I think she will live a long time—I hope so.’

Not another word was spoken, neither did we move from the balcony whereon we leaned, while my thoughts, unbidden, flew over the sea, to the far land whence whispers of love still came to me, as from

the life beyond the grave, where the bonds of time are broken, and the lost is given back—I threw my soul upon those waters, and I was tempted to throw my voice along with it, in passionate floods of song.—Could anything in the world be found to change me, and if anything, could the man at my side? We remained until the evening darkened; he took up a shawl and folded it about me in his masterful way, as if with intent to take possession of me. Yet I cannot say I was put in maidenly fear of any farther enterprise on the colonel's part; he was 'unco' civil' as the Scotchman who never hazarded a chaste salute of his betrothed lassie; starched in his dignity, like the 'proud Duke' of Somerset, whose second wife venturing to kiss him, he rebuked her with 'Madam, my first wife was a Percy, and she never attempted such a liberty!' I did not believe the colonel would in any way compromise himself, yet, as it was now night, I saw fit to come in and join the company.

We remained in the hotel a couple of days; much rain coming down, we kept mostly within doors, the colonel appearing

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as my shadow, and with almost as little to say. He was called up to a division in the House, and our party were putting themselves in array for train to town.

'So the colonel is an engaged man at last,' said Mrs. Pembridge, confidentially to me. 'You have made him your slave, you sly little coquette.'

'I? No, surely!'

'Don't deny it to me, I know everything. I shall tell everybody—that evening, out on the balcony—don't you pretend not to know what I mean; he proposed, and you accepted him.'

'Indeed, there was nothing of the kind.'

'I know there was; he as good as told me so; you cannot go back now. He has commissioned Captain Pembridge to settle matters with your grandmother. I know my husband has written to her already.'

Was I caught by one of those surprises by which fate confounds the purposes of mortals? How had I drifted into the inevitable, unconsciously, so far? In sooth I knew not; I could remember very little that had been said upon that balcony, beneath the moonlight, where, Juliet-like,

I had leaned, with a staid middle-aged Romeo by my side, ineloquent of love. Was it sure that I could not go back ? and how, in the name of eccentricity, had it happened without my knowing ? Through absence of mind ? or was it the fault of the moon ?



## CHAPTER VII.

NOBODY ASKED YOU, SIR !

‘Peace be with Burgundy ;  
Since that respects of fortune are his love,  
I shall not be his wife.’—*King Lear.*

I HAD no roseate couch on our journey up to town, finding myself a target for the small wit of our party, as a bride-elect, to be purchased somewhat high in the way of settlements. The colonel, I was assured, would do what was handsome in that line, and wedding dresses, jewels, and paraphernalia, were freely discussed between the Marine Parade and Victoria.

It so chanced that I had something of more present and absorbing interest to fill my mind for the time being than such

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prospective details of the high fortunes I was supposed to have achieved. I was to appear in a few weeks at St. James's Hall, and to do my best was the one aim towards which every nerve and fibre of my being was strained to the point of agony ; one passion thus possessing me, there was scarce room in my woman's nature for a second object of anxiety. What singer, especially a young singer, can go before the public in music new to her, without first trying its effects, and drawing out her powers by the counsel and direction of a master experienced, not only in his art, but in the science of teaching others to execute what himself, perhaps, can only conceive ? For so the muse of sweet song is wont to divide her gifts amongst her most ardent votaries. Such a maestro after my own heart I found in Signor Stradella, conductor of the concert, who invited me to go through my songs at his own house ; an arrangement which suited me admirably, as I found even my private daily practice was a hardly bearable tax on the patience of Grannie and Miss Cross, neither of whom could see any object worth achieving

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by work in earnest on the part of a girl whose station set her above the vulgar crowd of *artistes* and professors, condemning her to inanity as an attribute of young ladyhood, and incompetence as ‘genteel’; this last vile archaism being not yet banished from their dictionary. It was a relief to pass an hour with a true musician, patient of those endless repetitions and trials of note upon note, by which serious application only can the perfection of art be touched—that spontaneous-like flow and complete ease in execution which are the reward of perseverance alone, both on the part of master and student. Difficulties on the head of propriety where smoothed by the fact of Signor Stradella being married to an English lady of fortune, although he chose to be independent through his talents as teacher and composer. A long and eventful intimacy was begun at these concert repetitions, but which the conubial status of my musical father-confessor proved effectual to confine, in this case, within strict limits of friendship.

The first day I went through one only of the three songs I was to sing, in a long hour

and a half's lesson, which taught me more than I ever knew before how much I had yet to learn ; nevertheless, Signor Stradella assured me of success beyond that any of the other ladies could hope for. They had their friends to praise them ; I must make the public my friend, the best, the most impartial, the easiest to please by true merit, and earnest, even though imperfect endeavor.

'I teach many ladies who have good voices,' he said, 'but they will not be taught good singing.; they are afraid of one another to sing well—one jealous say it is not lady-like to sing as artist. You are not afraid to be a singer,' he added, with a smile.

On returning to our toy house in St. Iago's Square, I found the colonel planted in the middle of the drawing-room with Grannie, Miss Cross being, happily, out. Loud interjections greeted me on having stayed away at least an hour past my appointed time. I pleaded my music lesson, and the impending concert. There was no secret as to that—my name had been announced amidst the 'distinguished amateurs who kindly gave their assistance,' a peri-

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phrase which much jarred on my artistic notions.

'Some ladies,' put in the colonel, 'would object to sing in public.'

He had better have let that be ; I was nettled at my grandmother's ill-humor, connected somehow in my mind with his presence there before me ; evidently he had remained a long time, expecting me to come in, and I had been made the subject of a discussion akin to what is usually held on those ill-bred persons who keep a dinner-party waiting. I was piqued, too, at his reticence with myself ; neither by word nor letter had he made anything like what my ideas were of a proper proposal ; other people chose to set it down as my duty to pick up the handkerchief he had thrown, but what was that to me ?

'Some ladies would object to be called "Polly," as I have heard you say you would call your wife,' was my reply, reckless of consequences.

'Sing in public ! she won't sing in public—that's all a mistake about putting in her name for that concert—she will not sing,' croaked Grannie.

I could have bitten off a piece of her tongue, but was fain to bite my own lips and be silent, thinking out my battle to come. After the colonel's departure, I had to wrestle as best I could with the trouble he had made for me.

'Oh, Lily ! Lily ! how you horrified me !' broke out my grandmother. 'I could do nothing to stop you—anyone looking on would say, there was an honest man, ready to take you out of disgrace and obscurity, and you behaved to him like a flippant coquette. Of course you must give up singing at St. James's Hall.'

'My name is out in the bills, and you have given your consent, Grannie ; I cannot retract now. Colonel Barclay ought not to wish me to break my word, even if I were engaged to him, which I do not consider I am.'

'Lily, this is absurd affectation ; do you not know he is ready to marry you ?'

'It may be so, but he has not asked me to be his wife.'

'He has done the same thing over and over again. A man that will settle three thousand a year on you ; think of that, after

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the straits we have been put to. You can have every luxury and elegance with that, as much as you need wish; no trouble managing servants on short commons. Think what a relief it is to afford good dinners, and plenty of beef to satisfy servants !'

I cannot say it occurred to me that my wealthy suitor was picking a quarrel with Grannie, on extraneous pretexts, being in fact dissatisfied upon the money question ; nevertheless, I was prompted to inquire :

' How about the amount I can contribute to the housekeeping ? He will not think much about that, I suppose ? He will let me spend whatever I have of my own as pin-money ?'

' Oh no, no ! We dare not talk of such a thing. I am to allow you a thousand a year, and you must never let him know of the mortgages. I will pay them off during my life out of my own income.'

' You will have no income left worth speaking of, Grannie dear, if you allow me a thousand a year. Do you propose to live with us ?'

' Oh no ! oh no ! He is not a man I dare

attempt such a thing with ; I cannot live with you, married to him.'

'Then, I will never marry him on those terms. You must be independent. Five hundred a year is the utmost you could afford to allow me, and nothing left to pay off mortgages with.'

'Don't talk of such a thing now ; it might put him off. Wait, wait, until we see what will happen, and give up your singing, for the sake of heaven, or you'll ruin yourself and me. Promise me you will, and I'll do anything in the world for you. I'll buy you a tiara of diamonds, when we see a bargain. Do promise me !'

'Anything but that, Grannie, I would do for you—I do not care for diamonds.'

'Remember, Lily, I can never come to London with you again after this season, so if you want to live in town, you must find a way for yourself—I cannot live with you another year ; you would kill me, and I could do you no good, for you never will take my advice—all your own way, headlong.'

In this pleasant humour, we went together to lunch at Mrs. Dodd's, to meet the

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colonel again. Miss Cross, through *pique*, stopping at home to embroider slippers for some other elderly swain, on whom her designs seemed more like to prosper, in her own opinion, at least, than any she could now entertain against the inconstant colonel. Her sulking fit was a welcome diversion to the pressure put upon me by others, and she fairly allowed she could expect no chance when once he fancied me.

The colonel had not yet arrived when we were ushered into Mrs. Dodd's *boudoir*, and she improved the occasion to make a private display of her jewel-case for our entertainment. Of diamonds there was a collection second to that of few indeed, under the rank of marchioness ; together with ample provision of pearls, emeralds, and minor ornaments of coral, onyx, and gold, with an endless variety of rings, every article for use or fancy that a lady's 'feminine world,' as the old Roman term was, could comprise —many of the choicest specimens never having been worn, as their mistress informed me, and on her taste being praised :

'Oh, 'tis the money does everything,' she

said ; ‘ taste won’t do—you must have the money.’

‘ Captain Dodd thinks nothing too good for you,’ I said ; ‘ he must be a very kind husband ; I’m sure he makes you very happy.’

‘ Yes, very happy—oh, my dear, ’tis the money makes the happiness—yes, indeed, he is the best, the kindest’—and the lady gave a sad little sigh.

She led the way to the drawing-room, as the other guests arrived. Grannie followed, keeping me close at her side, with a running commentary on the incalculable value of diamonds to a woman in the world ; being without them, we could not venture to appear at Court nor meet our unfriendly kinswoman, Lady Augusta St. Aubyn, on equal terms ; if I had a spark of spirit in my composition it was impossible I could let slip the chance now thrown in my way—Colonel Barclay’s money would do everything for me.

True, money can do much, when kindness goes with it, and sympathy with the higher aims of life has not been dried up in the

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rich man's soul by desire of his own 'good things,' whose reward is base, low, and unprofitable, having no part in love either earthly or heavenly. I was tempted to set my foot upon the pedestal of wealth, and the power of wealth, so I could use them as helps, not hindrances—my hand, and the portion of charms I had to give, I might barter for the sake of being lifted out of a state of reproach—but these only; not to sink into a common woman of fashion would I sell my hopes of fame.

The colonel came, also Mr. Elliot and Mr. Harcourt, invited, I suppose, in theatrical phrase, to 'weight' my grandmother. We were a pleasant party, but for the colonel frowning cold and grim upon the St. James's Hall business, bent, it seemed, on making mischief for me with my friends, unless I would go, not my own way, but his, in the matter.

'Say you have a cold—I will pay Mrs. Forest to take your place at the concert,' he said; 'that will do just as well: they have two professionals to sing already; I told your grandmother it was not fit for you to be associated with a thing of that kind.'

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'With Mrs. Forest, certainly not, I never intended to be ; she is an *opéra bouffe* singer now.'

'A very charming woman—exceedingly charming in private ; more ladylike than on the stage.'

'How do you know ? Are you very intimate with her ?'

'Not very intimate ; I went round behind the scenes to speak to her last night, and could not get near her for the fellows hanging about her dressing-room door.'

'I have heard that is improper—so an actress told me, Mrs. Heathcote, a very correct woman.'

'You disapprove of my going behind the scenes to meet Mrs. Forest ?'

'Of course I do, most decidedly disapprove of both her and you.'

'Well, then, I'll never do it again if you will promise me to avoid the stage in future.'

'I cannot see the sense of such a promise ; I am not going on the stage.'

'The same thing—St. James's Hall.'

'I can't see that—and I will not make up

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a story, and bring Mrs. Forest in my place. I hate the woman's name !

'So do I hate all singers and music of every kind !' ejaculated the colonel, to deepen my disgrace.

Was I then possessed by a morbid desire to thrust myself before the public gaze, friends and lovers notwithstanding ? By no means ; rather did I shrink from the ordeal so alien to the place I should have chosen for my life at Arthur's side, partaking of his fame, and adding, perhaps, an ornament to it, a high-placed votary of High Art, not a swimmer for life in the cold deep stream of the world. One word from lips I loved, and I would have given up this, or anything ; but this man ! Why, no tie, even of gratitude, bound me to him as yet, that I should stop short at his beck in my desperate effort to rise above the ruck of society's outsiders.

'What will you say if I persuade your grandmother to allow you a thousand a year ?' he inquired softly, as we left the dining-room.

'I say I will not have more than five

hundred ; it is best to tell you the truth at once.'

' That will not do, you know ; I cannot help it, if you take it that way.'

' Very well, it need not do, there is no reason why it should, colonel. Good morning.'

A few days afterwards, there appeared the following advertisement in a morning paper, no *Matrimonial News* existing in those days on behalf of ' persons wanting to marry ':

' MATRIMONIAL.—Wanted, a partner for life by a Radical M.P., of commercial antecedents, aristocratic proclivities, and uncertain age. Must be young, pretty, clever, and well connected. Operatic star preferred, who will be expected to renounce all other engagements and prospects, previous to the gallant M.P. throwing the handkerchief. State income, and capital, real or personal. No widows on life annuities need apply.'

By whom this skit was perpetrated, whether Miss Cross, in malice, Mr. Elliot, in

envy, or my old rival, Mrs. Forest, in hatred  
and all uncharitableness devised and sent  
it to the paper, I leave as a riddle to be  
read by the ingenious reader.



## CHAPTER VIII.

VOX POPULI.

‘Oh, give me but my hollow tree,  
A crust of bread, and liberty !’

I HAD refused him—not formally, as a man of his type seldom hazards being rejected, choosing rather such friendly mediators in his love suits as can serve the secondary purpose of feather beds to break that worst kind of fall that can happen to men through a slip of the tongue. When a lover speaks for himself, as I knew from sad experience, he may be false ; when a wooer pleads his cause by attorney, I began to think he must surely be the reverse of true. To put it to the proof, and for the satisfaction of others, as I was much taunted

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with having thrown my prize away, I wrote to the colonel as follows :

' DEAR COLONEL BARCLAY.—Is it the case, as I have concluded for myself, that on my accepting the honor you intended me, my grandmother consented to settle a thousand a year out of her present income upon me? If so, as I know she could not give me more than five hundred, without depriving herself of many things to which she is accustomed (and to this I could not agree), I take it for granted that all is over between us, and that you wish to meet henceforth as friends only, and am yours sincerely,

' LEILA FORTESCUE.'

One day while I was out rehearsing my music with Signor Stradella came the colonel's reply, couched in a couple of brief sentences, implying censure on somebody else, and enclosing my luckless epistle, which, as he wrote, he felt ' bound in honor to return.' Doing so in this fashion, the correspondence fell into Grannie's hands, who, during my absence, opened it, and

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worked herself into such wrath and indignation against poor me as made it plain we could not continue much longer to live under the same roof. I had actually drawn suspicions on our solvency and respectability, Grannie said, and all the water in the sea could never wash me before the world of the disgrace I had brought upon myself ; the people said Colonel Barclay had jilted me ! Even so ; I was fain to let them, and bethink me of a change in my life.

The day before the concert, we had a kind of rehearsal at St. James's Hall, and I caught sight of the colonel in one of the passages, in hot flirtation with a lady who was pointed out to me as Mrs. Forest. I should not have recognised her in hair dyed yellow, having formerly known her in tresses as raven as my own. I knew well enough, though, what brought her there : she was on the watch to take my place, on any failure of mine to appear.

I was considerably amused, observing the two, myself unobserved by them, and puzzled much to solve the reason why, when a man's fancy is set on one dark-haired charmer, a law of his being seems

to attract him towards a second fair one (always with golden locks) at one and the same time.

None the less was the colonel planted close to the orchestra, under my feet, on the night when I appeared at St. James's Hall. A histriomastix in theory, hot as Prynne himself, his practice in such matters was but another proof of the inherent masculine variability of his nature. I had rather not have known he was so close to me, but some indiscreet flutterer was at my ear with the tale, just before I came on for my ordeal.

And an ordeal it was to me, as if of fire and hot ploughshares, bitter words of anger having forbidden me to stand upon that spot beneath the general gaze, and I had to go to the hall alone. It came to that at last: I had to forbid Grannie or Miss Cross accompanying me, in such wise as a fierce wild creature turns to bay, fighting for life. Either of them would have driven me crazy with denunciations, and, what was worse, disturbed the balance of my voice; as it was, I was haunted by terrors lest the delicate, rich notes might

slip from my command, and either curdle in my throat or strike at fault and out of tune. There was more to overawe than to reassure in a glance at the great room, packed with its thousands, from the mechanical *dilettante* who purchases his sixpennyworth of sweet sounds, graduating upwards to Royalty itself; truly, a goodly sight to look upon for the chosen darlings of the public. Such was not I! Music and song preceded my attempt, and several ladies with voices not untuneful, nor unpleasing, were warmly applauded by troops of friends dispersed through the room, with mild assent on the part of the general public. Thus much I gathered from remarks around me. When my time came, the thought flashed upon me that, probably, there were not a dozen pair of eyes in that vast throng that knew my face; so much the better, if those who knew me best were fain to crush me down! I came forward almost in silence: scarce a hand welcomed a stranger without any of that nerve by which the skilled performer moves and controls the public by tact and look, even before the contest for their favor is begun.

I was made to feel I had my way to win.

Whilst the preliminary bars were playing, I took my desperate resolve ; with my life, as it were, in my hand, I began to sing, in silence that might be felt from end to end of the hushed mass of human beings. The first verse over between life and death, was followed by loud bursts of applause. Thus emboldened, I rose to my full power in the second, which changed from one key to another in wild cadences, and back again, like the heart to its first love—then came the answer to my appeal, not in weak clapping of kid gloves, but in the roar of many voices from that sea of upturned heads, straining eagerly forward to catch the sight and sound of a pale girl singing out her very heart and soul; they knew she sang in earnest, those hard, rough men, ignorant of much, yet taught to know truth from falsehood, in the strife for daily bread ; toilers beneath God's curse in the sweat of their brow, less grievous than man's self-imposed burden of idleness, that enforced hindrance between the rich and the kingdoms of earth and heaven !

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I had resisted that devil now, and the world was overcome by the bold grasp that crushed its sting within my little hand ; no half-hearted work had done it, but the resolution that dares and conquers all. My second song, the ever popular ‘Last Rose of Summer,’ put the seal to my stamp of success ; such a voice and such pathos were never heard, as Signor Stradella said, since Mary Stuart first listened to those strains, while David Rizzio sang.

Again the shouts and the roar surging up, impatient for a sight of me. I had to come on, pale with the fever of my triumph ; fame my one passion now, since love was quenched. Can woman’s breast beat with such passion twice, and yet not die ? Yes, for they helped me to bear it, those thousands whose pulses beat with mine ; their strength was new strength added to my life, new hope to wing my soul.

Grannie waited for me at the door of the artists’ room, crying and sobbing with emotion : she kissed me—a rare kindness in her—and now, alas ! too late : though she may have loved me as a mother, she had not been as a tender mother to me ; the

sharp sword of her tongue had entered into my soul, and I shrank back with eyes averted towards those mighty masses whose hearts could feel with me. Now they were on my side, she could love me too, and soothe the galled pride with flattering caresses: too late—too late! I had chosen my part in this world—away from her—alone with my deep heart-wound—free!



## CHAPTER IX.

### A LITTLE MORE THAN KIN.

NEXT day, and the next, and the day after that, brought proof upon proof that the ends I had rough-hewn for myself were so shaped by the providence called success, as to justify me in the means, at the bar of the world's judgment. A chorus of newspapers wrote me up—to the skies, with scarce a metaphor, it could be said, for one compared my vocalisation to a burst of fireworks, with a cascade of notes descending towards the earth like falling sparks; another likened my advent to that of a meteor, or comet; that a star had risen in the musical world was the verdict of the most critical—my ancient adversary, the

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*Empress*, chiming in with the rest, gushed with fulsome adulation, in the usual style of that feminine print.

Circulating in courtly regions, that special number fell into the hands of Lady Augusta St. Aubyn, my father's cousin, whom I had been taught to bar from any kinship with me, since she drew her harsh conclusion 'there are too many women who sing.' Strange reversal of opinion! the third day after my public appearance brought her hired brougham to our door, in the train of several superior equipages, so that she was not ashamed to present her card and person in our tiny drawing-room.

'My dear girl, what a genius you are!' she launched out at me, after a reception almost too frigid for common politeness from Grannie, who was a good hater, and prone to resent slights as worse than injuries. 'Why, they say you composed that lovely song yourself—is it possible?'

'The first song was my own.'

'I read all about it this morning in the *Empress*, and so I rushed off here—'

'When you saw my name in the

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*Empress?* Had you not heard of it before ?

' My dear, I heard you—I was there ; all the world was there—the most splendid audience ever seen in St. James's Hall ; people don't go there except for some special thing like this——'

' People,' in Lady Augusta's vocabulary, standing for the ' Upper Ten.'

' Well,' she appealed to Grannie, ' you must be proud of such a child !'

Grannie could not take it from that quarter.

' Well, yes, I am proud of her talents, and she has done it once, but I hope she will never sing in public again till she is married ; it is not good for a young girl.'

' Oh, don't say that, to deprive us of such a treat ! Miss Fortescue, you must come and see me often, and we can make our calls together—we are cousins, you know ! I tell all my friends—I am proud of my cousin.'

' You don't intend to call at her house—to drive out with her ?' inquired Grannie, as soon as our visitor had turned her back upon the scene.

‘ Both one and the other, if she wishes it ; I have not so many friends to throw away.’

‘ She was always an enemy to me—you ought to treat her as an enemy—that is better than such false shows of friendship.’

‘ I would rather turn an enemy into a friend.’

‘ You cannot make a friend of any of that family, if you were to cut your throat to please them. Don’t you know her brother robbed and cheated us ?’

‘ It may be so ; he is dead ; I have heard he was not very good to her either.’

‘ Don’t you remember how she tried to keep you down, and made little of you for attempting to be a singer ?’

‘ She is not the only one who did that—I had to win my way for myself, before she would care to know me ; be it so, why should we not be on fair terms now, if it suits her and me ?’

‘ How can you say such a thing ?—so mean to forget her slights ! Oh, Lily, if you had a spirit like me !’

‘ Heaven forbid, Grannie ! I am not a

good hater; I think life too short for that.'

'And you say that to me—you are no child of mine; you had better go and stable your horses with my lady.'

'Are you jesting, Grannie? You are apt to tell such bitter truths.'

'Remember, I will never live with you after you are twenty-one.'

'Then I have not very long—well, if it were to be as you say, I would never have chosen to leave you for her.'

And so I devoured the bitterness of my heart. A few days afterwards, I was sitting beside my newly acquainted kinswoman at a stall in a charity bazaar, being invited to assist her benevolent work on principles of mutual advantage to ourselves. Proud and poor, elderly and thin, she found it pleasant to be supported by a young cousin, now becoming the 'talk of London' as a musical prodigy, while the same prodigy was nothing loth to be no longer a myth, heard of but not seen, and the world's flattery and homage, once tasted, are too apt to become as meat and drink to woman, unloved, though fair and young.

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In addition to the usual temptations of a charity stall, Berlin wool, dolls' tea cups, and useless miscellanea at extortionate prices, we devised a lure to entice men, after the fashion used in catching larks and other foolish birds, namely, a couple of dozen tiny brushes with mirror in the back, such as serve the double purpose of adjusting the twist of the moustache at odd moments, and contemplating the owner's charms, by a turn of the fingers. These, laid out temptingly upon our table, caught at once the eye of every male creature passing by; few resisted and walked on, many walked round and round, seeking a pretext to bargain for one of the coveted articles, and finding none of a non-personal kind, were discontent to look and long. More walked boldly up, and with an infinite variety of lame excuses, paid five shillings a-piece for the dainty little commodities that cost us but two. We had only one left, when my two admirers, Mr. Elliott and Colonel Barclay, came up together to ask the price: 'too dear,' the latter pronounced; Mr. Elliot, being a poor man, paid it, and carried off the prize,

leaving the colonel at odds with me over some other article.

'I know I must buy something, whether I will or not,' he grumbled.

'Don't say that, colonel; as far as I am concerned I would rather you pleased yourself.'

'Playing at shop—an amusement for little girls—' he muttered on; I felt, and enjoyed his disappointment better than he could venture to express it. I myself was what he coveted, now I had become a celebrity—I knew it, as also that, accustomed to being hunted by women for his money's worth, he prized me the more on account of my open contempt of his feelings.

'So you sit here all day long, like—what? What was that story of the moated grange? And without a husband?'

I was not unconscious of the dry sneer from this man who had made my home odious to me, without frankly offering me another; he had chosen me, not I him, so I defied him.

'Like yourself, in bachelor meditation

fancy free—I care for no man ; be it true or not that no man cares for me.'

'You are not in love ?'

'I have not got the bad fashion—I usually content myself with inflicting that punishment on others—after your evil example again ; but you've something worse the matter with you than love ; you look as white as you did on board the *Dione*, that day the wind got up—are you sick ? or out of temper ? I like to see gentlemen lose their tempers.'

'You like to provoke them, do you ? I'm a beautiful temper.'

'You'll want it then to-night ; haven't you got to reply to a speech of Mr. St. Swithin Winterflood's ? — that ultra zealous reformer, who is always bringing you into hot water.'

'Cold water, you mean, that's what he wants to thrust down everybody's throat, by Act of Parliament ; but the House don't go with him in that sort of thing.'

'Not altogether ; but don't you think a reform is needed ? Surely he is a good man——'

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'No, I say he is a bad man, thoroughly bad; he wants to ruin the whole trade.'

'Ah, I see! as bad as St. Paul at Ephesus?'

No answer by the colonel to the allusion; seeming not to understand, he brought a counter attack:

'Going to show yourself in that theatre over the way?'

He referred to a species of makeshift where a set of amateurs were exhibiting themselves in a kind of game of romps, or bastard burlesque, fashionable in those days, called 'Mumbo Jumbo,' at five shillings admission, for the benefit of the charity, promoted by the players going about the Bazaar in their absurd disguises to attract an audience. At a special hour I had been requested to sing on the same terms, as a superior attraction. I told the colonel so, adding:

'I know you would not pay five shillings to hear me.'

'Not there—our congregation don't approve of theatres—but to hear you sing anywhere else I would. Why can't you

concentrate your genius, and make one home happy ?'

' Because I will not marry without love, for money, or rank, or any worldly temptation.'

' Oh, that's your theatrical education coming out.'

' No, colonel ; it is you who cannot understand—because—because I do not believe you ever were in love.'

' Oh, how can you say so ? how little do you know me !'

' You had best have a wife made to order for you. Have you ever heard of King Alphonso of Spain, who thought himself so wise he ought to have been consulted at the creation of the universe to suggest improvements ?'

Laughing, I saw him shy away, while another gentleman, who for some time had eyed our stall from a distance, approached us by a series of erratic gyrations from one person to another, and one thing to another, interrupting his course, till he finally set himself down in familiar talk beside Lady Augusta. There they buried themselves in their subject of discourse—the said gentle-

man—for about five minutes; then I became their theme, and we were introduced to each other by Lady Augusta as cousins both of hers, his name Charlie Bouverie. By what law of nature are all Charlies *mauvais sujets*? as all colonels are accomplished adepts in the higher branches of flirtation elaborated as a science? This one's acquaintance was sweet to the lips; it might be bitter to the heart of many women.

'What have you been doing with yourself, Miss Fortescue? playing Queen of Hearts?'

'No, that's a losing game; I prefer setting a mouse-trap for men; I've sold all my toasted cheese.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'Why, my brushes with looking-glasses; I think I am becoming acquainted with the weakness of men.'

'Oh, those nice little things? Sell me one.'

'I have not one left; all the gentlemen want one.'

'Send for some now, and do keep one for me; I'll take two, if you like! And, Miss Fortescue, I do want so to hear you

sing. I had a ticket for St. James's Hall the other night, but there was a dinner and three balls to go to. You sing here, I am told. When ?

' In about half an hour.'

' I'll stop here till then.'

' Yes, but you must not expect me to talk to you all the time ; you'd spoil my voice—'

' Why so ? I can talk all day, and it doesn't spoil my singing voice.'

' Perhaps you've got none to spoil.'

' Oh yes, I have ; I think of taking to singing professionally—seriously I do, only my family won't hear of it. I've got no money at all, so I must make it if I can in some way, and singing is as good as any other. I was so anxious to be introduced to you, because they say you're the most wonderful lady singer. Did you remark me looking out for your stall ever since I came into the bazaar ?'

I would not own that I had.

' You must have observed me.'

His was a presence to attract observation, and he knew it ; a figure bearing the stamp of rank and fashion, a face with too much

beauty for a man, in my mind, not loving that kind of rivalry. He rattled on, till I was called away to sing ; then followed me, paying five shillings for a seat close under the miniature stage, and fed with devouring eyes and ears upon the sight and sound of me. It was written in our fate that we should see much of each other, but I was not disposed to encourage an intimacy now. I had been so often in trouble on the marriage question, that so long as I remained under my grandmother's roof, I lived in dread of every man whose notice I attracted. This I learnt was one of the 'curled darlings' of London, grandson of a Duke ; 'no money at all' in his case meant five hundred a year, with a suitable position to offer an heiress who could put a zero against that amount ; so I resolved to avoid him, till the end of the season.

That consummation came in a few days afterwards with stormy discussions as to the breaking up or adhesion of our party of three. Grannie and Miss Cross were agreed on one thing only—I must marry, if not the colonel, why then, Mr. Elliot, or anybody else. This latter gentleman made

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his P. P. C. visit, and took up rather a queer line of argument to enforce some such course; making a common theme of Grannie and myself:

‘One of the two ought to marry,’ he urged.

‘Neither of us seems much disposed that way. Is it true that you are in love with old Lady Cameron?’

‘In love? no. I think she would like to get married again—’

‘What nonsense! at her age——’

‘Why, people fall in love at any age.’

‘I don’t believe it.’

‘I know they do; her friend Lady Holly-hock got married lately at seventy-two, and the next day found her husband drunk under the table; she sent for her son to turn her lord and master out of the house. “I can’t, mother,” said the young man; “what did you marry him for?” and the old lady answered, “I could not help it, my dear, I was in love!” There’s an instance!’

‘That means you intend to marry Lady Cameron; well, I hope the poor old thing won’t find you tipsy under the table; she

has no son to turn you out, but she is old enough to be your mother—what a wife for you !

‘ No—no—if anyone else will have me—’

I did not take the hint, but let him go, and pronounced him ready to marry Lady Cameron, myself, or grandmother, indifferent to the high indignation of the latter at my irreverent gibing. It was time we should agree to be friends apart, if on the point of lovers she and I came in each other’s way. What was to be done ?

Lady Augusta St. Aubyn cut the knot by asking me to live with her ; she understood that Mrs. Fortescue felt obliged to reside on her estate in the West, while I must feel lost away from London, now ; she herself had grown accustomed to town life, so that we should suit one another, and in her solitary position she had something that drew me to her by that tie of kindred which, knit in blood, not in water of the general stream of the human race, is thickened by a mutual need.

Grannie and I went our way in peace ; she had enough to spend in comfort and

satisfaction on the broad acres she clung to more than her own flesh—this is not an uncommon, nor yet is it an amiable weakness of her caste—but she was generous to me, who could not live to please her ; five hundred a year was my independence—my own mistress for the time to come—it was well that it was so, before the lifting of the clouds that hid my life's great catastrophe from my vision of things to be.



## CHAPTER X.

### AMONG COURT LADIES.

IN London I remained with Lady Augusta in her neat establishment, located in a square on the confines of Belgravia, and remarkable rather for the style than expense of its appointments; a view of greenery in front and back rendered tolerable the residence there up to the end of August, imposed on herself by its mistress for motives of economy. She could not afford, she considered, more than two months *villettiatura*, and preferred the months of September and October, when the best people were to be met at the seaside. This year she chose to take her allowance of outing at London-super-Mare. Cousin Charlie Bouverie turned up a few

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days after our arrival, and proposed a piano as an addition to our marine establishment. With a fair tenor voice, and some aptitude for music, he was most convenient as assistant and companion in and out of doors ; he would play accompaniments and sing duets with me for hours together, also conduct me to remote regions on the beach, where we could throw out long notes, singing against the noise of the waves to strengthen our voices.

Being the cousin of my cousin, I considered him as a kind of connection of my own, and it never occurred to me to see a personal admirer in a man, the whole of whose thoughts and affections were pre-engaged to one object of devotion—himself. None the less acceptable was he for ornament and use as a squire-of-dames, in a harmless way, we hoped, Lady Augusta and I calling him ‘our own Don Juan,’ by way of pet name, and as a distinction, I suppose, from anyone else’s Don Juan. As to me, I was not too curious to inquire into the matter, having subsided into a quiet consciousness of

some special attraction of my own for the less worthy part of the male human race.

Is it because men are apt to admire in women such opposite qualities to those they themselves possess, that good men are often enamoured of the worthless of our sex, while those who are most corrupted by the world still prefer amongst us the true and pure?

Charlie Bouverie gave me good help in trying and copying my compositions. I was deeply absorbed in one production, a cantata on the story of Cupid and Psyche. My good friend, Miss Raleigh, was author of the words to which I tasked myself to wed music not unworthy of the sweet theme, love. It is certain that Charlie's sympathetic collaboration carried along my work as my own solitary plodding could not have done. He could always give the keynote to my artistic and imaginary passion; of love between us there was none on his side, to the best of my belief; for myself I could answer certainly. Nevertheless, we were seen together, on beach, on equestrian parade, and at ball,

the simulacra of a pair of lovers, in all eyes but our own.

In such congenial companionship, my cantata grew, to receive its final form later, under the guidance of an older head and hand, Signor Stradella's. The maestro made me and Charlie his pet pupils both, myself the chief in favor; and as we each had a part in the cantata, much pleasant time was spent in study under him during the long winter in London. In the early spring season, my work was to see the light, at a concert given by Signor Stradella in the town palace of one of the first nobles in the land, where to be seen and heard was to achieve fame in the space of an hour. Myself and Charlie were to sing the principal parts of Psyche and Cupid; three celebrities of English song accepted the solo parts of the father and sisters of Psyche, assisted by a chorus trained with infinite care by Signor Stradella, in whose able hands rested the conduct of all.

Far more trying than at St. James's Hall was the ordeal I had to pass, before a grand audience, cold and critical, too

sated to be eager listeners, too dignified to applaud heartily. It was like the work of the sculptor, set to hew out of hardest stone the form he had modelled first in plastic clay : true, the subdued tones of a high-bred company fell down to total silence ; true, no interruption was suffered, either by silk and golden lackey with ices, or belated guest with plain black garb and semi-royal name ; titles and thirst had to bide their time in patience until a pause in the music gave place to low applause and refreshments, and even then, so much more ado was made over the latter than the former, that I began to doubt whether I had succeeded at all, until the Duchess, our hostess, herself came up to congratulate and hope that she should meet me at Court the next drawing-room, where she had heard I was to be presented.

This was the first I had heard of it, but the prediction tended to fulfill itself, once uttered by the great queen of fashion. My cousin, Lady Augusta, whose right to pay her *devoirs* to the sovereign stood unimpeached, while the expediency of such act of homage grew less and less by repe-

tition, until, for various unassigned reasons, she dropped out of court circles altogether, Lady Augusta, as my cousin, now felt it was her duty to appear according to her rank, and present me as a *débutante* at the Queen's drawing-room.

Being thin to emaciation as to arms and neck, so that no skill of Worth or Elise could match those forms with the moulding of the padded bust, my kinswoman was fain to obtain a medical certificate, vouching for the palpable fact that she was weak in the chest and lungs, and could not without great risk and serious injury attend court in the regulation low bodice and short sleeves abominated of men. The high functionary whose office it is ineffectually to carp at the undraped tights of ballet girls, and on the other hand give warrant to milliners for stripping British matrons, back and bust, unseemly bare, without shred of gauze or *maillot*, the Lord Chamberlain, having examined and pondered the case, gave special authority for a compromise in the form of a low square cut, so as to display more limited inches of goose skin and collar-bone ; these

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were farther disguised by a throat band of velvet and pearls, and a cascade of fine gold chains, falling down to the edge of the lace and flowers constructed by the *modiste*, *secundum artem*.

For this indulgence I had to suffer vicariously, in a low-cut, sleeveless tunic, the keen March draughts of an English palace. I being not to the manner born, as the child of a summer clime, it was almost as much as my life was worth, or what I held more precious than life itself, my singing voice ; it took weeks of care to obviate the ill effects of that afternoon's work.

Charlie was our attendant here, as everywhere ; it was he who handed me forward towards the fair and gracious Princess, who visibly recognised my name and smiled with personal favor to me, while doing the office of state 'on behalf of her Majesty.' Young, like myself, and very sweet to look upon she was ; taste and modesty had adjusted her attire on bust and arms, undraped so far only as to show the faultless curve of falling shoulders, and indicate the rounded grace, whose delicate charm is to be felt, not too profanely.

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described. With her hereditary love of art, she singled me out from the throng of noteless young ladies of wealth and title presented at Court that day ; and then I knew I had won my triumph over the world, and pierced the barriers through with the electric chain of success ; what more could heart of mezzo-soprano desire ?

We had passed the throne-room, and were making our way through the crush, when I was swept somehow off my feet, and fell back against a soft mass, as it were a feather bed interspersed with sharp substances cutting into my back. As soon as I could turn and apologise, I was face to face with Lady Cameron, diamonds and all, which accounted for the circumstances. A lurch in the crowd drew me away a few paces, and Charlie whispered, ‘ Two cauliflowers and a savoy, that’s what broke your fall,’ most cruelly satirising the two bare whitened globes and huge bouquet which showed in front of her ladyship’s line of fortification; beneath, it was reported, a steel stays compressed the exuberance of her mature charms.

Behind her came her husband—according to my prediction—hapless Horatio Elliot. Alas, poor man! He had better have kept to his chance dinners, and luncheons from friendly house to house, with no tokens of wealth about him beyond his well-cut clothes and diamond pin, with his kindly nature to oblige all, and sure of a welcome everywhere, a dependent, if you will, on the general hospitality, but a better man than now. What a way to become independent of the world, to sell himself as husband to a foolish old woman, vain enough to be deceived by protestations of cupboard love, silly enough to be duped by the flattery of a man young enough to be her son! However, as he chose to proclaim in every society he was well content with his position and himself, it was nobody's business to find fault with so decent a specimen of matrimonial concord ; me, I knew, he could not look in the face for very shame.

He was screened from my observation by his spouse, until, she perversely swinging aside her ample person and paraphernalia,

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he stood confessed, and pointedly appealed to, as she exclaimed :

‘ Horatio dear, the Indian girl, I declare ! She will take an interest—I must tell her what we heard this morning, you know, my love ; bring me up to her, there’s a duck of a fellow !’

Thus adjured, her victim obediently made way amongst the female crush, as only a man polite and pressing can do ; and I found myself under a sharp shower of words and glances, which I felt, without reasoning on the cause, was the reverse of friendly.

‘ Any news of your Indian friends, Miss Fortescue ? General Hope Trevor, I mean ?’

‘ I have not the honor of Sir John’s acquaintance.’

‘ Oh ! I thought they were your great friends.’

‘ We have met, once or twice.’

‘ I thought you knew the family ; well, I’m glad to hear you say they were not intimate with you—you’ll be less sorry, by-and-bye ; poor Sir John is dying.’

I suppose I turned pale ; I felt so as to be past thinking of looks or appearances.

' You're shocked—so am I. It is very easy to predict what will come of it ; Arthur should be recalled at once. Very disgraceful of Government if they suffer him to remain under present circumstances —that's the general feeling in India, I can assure you, and if anyone knows, I ought ; disgraceful, abominable, infamous !'

There was some color to the lady's vehemence of asseveration lent by the fact that she had been the wife of an Indian general of illustrious name, and had spent the best years of her life as a leader of society in the Presidencies. How the matrons of that ilk would take up the tale of scandal against the fair culprit now in question, though not named in Lady Cameron's discourse, she better than any other present could foretell.

' Hush, hush, hush ! wait till we are outside—don't let's speak of it here !' remonstrated poor Mr. Elliot, in an insignificant whisper ; but the lady took advice, and held her tongue, remembering where she was.

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I plucked up boldness to say, in an undertone :

'Lady Diana will be a widow soon ?'

'Yes, isn't it dreadful to think of her being at liberty to——' Lady Cameron checked herself, pulling up just on the verge of the precipice ; but I knew her unspoken meaning, and it was very horrible to me. I was not conscious of having betrayed myself, until I heard her voice again, exclaiming : 'Bless us, going to faint, I declare ! The girl's stifled in this crush ; can't she be got outside ?'

Charlie Bouverie was at my side, and in the same moment the lady's husband volunteered his co-operation to carry out her suggestion and myself.

'No, no, not you, I want you,' she clamored ; 'I shall be crushed to a jelly if you leave me alone—don't you know, Horatio dear ?'

More was meant by this than met the ear, for the wretched man fell back from me, as if I had been a scorpion. Married for bread ! As a woman, I would choose oakum-picking rather, and cannot understand the act in a man, so long as the pro-

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verbial highway stones are to be found for the breaking.

A flute-like voice came through Lady Cameron's rude tones, with :

' Into my carriage, I have some sherry, that's what will revive her ; I always bring some with me.'

It was Lady Stormouth, and between her and Charlie I was brought through the crush. Anywhere out of the way of snobs ! Lady Cameron had come of that stock, and once married above it, though now fate was having its revenge upon her. She was a natural enemy of mine, but I felt rising in my career of art above all clouds of the base and mean, up towards those higher places of the earth where rank and genius meet on an equal pinnacle; as for the rest, what did it matter to me ?

One shaft had sped from that coarse, rude hand; was it true that my rival was likely ere long to be free ? After that, in sure course of time, to be Arthur's wife ? this barrier between us ? Oh, that I could tear his memory out, and my heart with it—forget my love and die !



## C H A P T E R X I.

### HAPPY THE WOOING.

Is there no way to cast out the old love,  
but by taking in a new fancy, a new care ?  
It was bitter, yet if that could be, I would  
try ; if not to love, yet to suffer myself to  
be loved, might bring change, if not sur-  
cease of sorrow. No man was thrown so  
much into contact with me as Charlie  
Bouverie ; too slight a thing I had hitherto  
considered him for serious regard, yet there  
was a faint shadow of Arthur in his way  
with me, a something I could not see in  
other men, the trick of the voice, the high-  
born grace of word and act, even to the  
touch of faithlessness—all minded me of  
what had won my love, and I could have  
wished such might win it again.

It was curious how he took possession of me, morning, noon, and night : I could neither walk, ride, nor rest, but he made one in the pastime ; as to my artistic successes, he seemed to take them altogether to himself, as if my invention, composition, nay, my very voice, were his, not my own. It was a part of his man's vanity that I should be acknowledged as the feminine paragon of the musical world—he having act and part with me ; the same world was always classing us together, we were paragraphed in parallel lines, photographed in one sitting by enthusiastic artists, and bore about with us in society the allegorical titles of Cupid and Psyche.

His nickname stuck by him closer than mine, as close, indeed, as his shadow on my path. One night among many, I remember, we were booked for the opera—Lady Augusta and I, together with, according to custom, our own Don Juan, or Cupid, as his double agnomen was. It so happened that we ladies arrived first, and on the way to our box, lo and behold ! Colonel Barclay lay in wait, with looks of unwholsome white, as it were the color of an oyster-shell, such

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as the mollusc may have acquired, similarly to the colonel, through being ‘crossed in love,’ as Sheridan has established. He was not behind-hand to improve the occasion, and had got possession of my opera-cloak, when up came Cupid with a bound along the corridor, and a contest ensued for the coveted wrap, just fallen from my shoulders. Both furious, and both polite, the pair comported themselves much of a muchness with two tomcats, fixed facing each other with smothered, indescribable noises—each eying each by the hour, not daring to fight, not caring to move or yield an inch, while a demure she-cat looks on, as innocently as she can, the artful puss all the while taking quiet enjoyment of the mischief she has caused. Not altogether dissimilar was my part in the scene, until Charlie carried off the mantle as a matter of course; then I threw out a little oil on the troubled waters by inviting the colonel to a seat.

‘Thank you,’ he answered, in fierce whispers; ‘send Cupid away first.’

Smiling impossibility, I subsided into my place, the said Cupid next me, looking as handsome as his name; I complacently

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taking stock of the female eyes fixed on me in envy, while I had made one man at least, who deserved no less of me, miserable that evening. The colonel went off in wrath, banging the door of our box, so as to draw the eyes of the party opposite us, who were no other than Lady Stormouth, and Miss Cross hooked on to her ladyship's train, in default of Grannie to drag about as a convenience, that deft elderly damsel having a cat like knack of falling upon her feet in 'good society.' Under her observation, I knew all I did, or appeared to do, that night in the way of flirtation was safe to be the town talk of the twenty-four hours next ensuing.

Anyhow, Charlie seemed bent on abetting the world in its design of making us lovers. Planted behind my ear, as the serpent by Eve, he opened all his mind in whispered confidences, evolved out of so simple a beginning as the discussion of the merits and charms of the girl-diva Adelina Patti. She was then before our eyes, a marvel of youth, enriched with gifts so rarely combined in one happy mortal, fair and virgin as the angels, who alone could

rob her of the palm of song. As I applauded with a *furore* that drove the gallery and amphitheatre into wilder demonstrations of delight along with me, he smiled, as it were to say, ‘Rash little enthusiast!’ and put the question, ‘Do you feel envious of her?’

‘Envious? no; do I look like that bad passion?’

‘No; but don’t you long to be in Adelina’s place? Have you ever thought of coming out as a *prima donna*?’

I shrank back into myself. No; there were memories and reasons which forbade —my ambition was to be a composer of operas only; as a singer I was bounded to the concert platform. I said so.

‘Because I have thought of doing something of the kind,’ he pursued; ‘Signor Stradella thinks all the world of my voice —he is sure I should succeed there,’ and he threw his eyes over the footlights. ‘Do you advise me to try?’

‘Certainly not in London at first; try what you can do with some audience who know nothing about you, before you risk yourself here.’

‘How do I know that I could have the chance anywhere else? In town, now, all my friends would come, and fill the house—I need not care about the public at all.’

‘So much the worse: the public are the artist’s only true friend. If I had a mind to skate on the ice for the first time, I should not call my “friends,” as you call your vast circle of acquaintances, to stand round the pond, looking on at my falls and failures.’

‘But why should I be a failure? why should I not succeed at once, if I am a born genius, as they tell me I am?’

‘Because on the stage, that is a task beyond mortal accomplishment; you begin a new line of art, which you have never practised, and, as in everything else, you must make failures before you can make a success, only you make your crude attempt in public, instead of in your own studio or chamber, that’s the difference.’

‘Well, I will try it out of town at first, if I can. You would not be an opera singer yourself, but you would not think the worse of me for it?’

‘Certainly not; that is better than idleness, if you work to deserve success.’

'But what would the world say to me ?'

'That depends on whether you succeed or fail ; in your position, the question is, which would be the worse for you ?'

'How ? If I fail, must not that be the worst ?'

'Then the whole town will laugh—and in a few months forget all about it ; men may do such things and live them down.'

'But if I succeed ?'

'If you should, and take to the stage as an opera singer, then all your friends will be sure to—well, not exactly cut you, but do very like it.'

'Because my grandfather was a duke, I cannot be an artist ! Is it that ?'

'By no means : only you must depend upon the great public, not your friends ; from the latter you can be saved by high merit only, such as to command the applause of the million ; I have found it so.'

'Would you advise me to try the venture ?'

'Not unless you have the true vocation of an artist, and are ready beforehand to count the cost.'

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'Could you help me in the trial? I know I should succeed if you would—we suit each other better than any couple in all London; don't you think so?'

'All London may think so: I am, perhaps, the only person amongst all the circle of your acquaintance who does not believe you are in love with me.'

'And don't you believe—don't you know I am?'

'That I do not.'

'Should I tell you so, if I were not?'

'That's just it, you never have told me so.'

'I have—a thousand times. I would not tell you anything but the truth—I would not, indeed; because I know it would be no use; if I told you anything else, you would not be—believe it.'

Then he fell into a stuttering hesitation of speech, of which, when in my presence, he never thereafter thoroughly got rid.

'That is your code of high honor, never to be found out in a fib?'

'Not by you—for—for the whole world, only I should not like you to sing in public. If I do, would you give up that for me?'

‘ You must not ask that : the public are my only fast friends hitherto ; they were kind to me the first—when no one else was. I owe my place in the world to “ the crowd’s untutored chivalry.” That phrase meets the truth in my experience, although I cannot remember where I caught the expression—it is not my own. Do you want to be like a peacock, and keep all the admiration to yourself ?’

‘ Oh no ! I only want you to love me ; do you think you could ?’

‘ I cannot tell you in a moment ; I have never expected this from you.’

‘ Oh, how can you say so ? don’t you know I have loved you these months--only I was afraid to tell you so ?’

‘ Lest I should eat you up, I suppose, as she spiders are said to dispose of their rejected suitors ? Well, since you have taken a good deal of time to think about it, so must I.’

I did not throw him off, having regard to the dreaded disgrace of Arthur’s marriage with my rival, that disgrace to be forestalled only by my marriage with a rival of his ;

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so I made soft answers to this wooer of mine.

‘ You will not reject me ?’

I could but do that in the end ; men’s hearts do not break in the process, or if they do, such fracture is wholesome discipline for the owner, so I said :

‘ I have not rejected you ; what I may do, most depends on whether I believe you.’

‘ Believe me ? Could I feign what I did not feel, and to a girl, who would have a right to trust to my honor ? I don’t mind flirting with a married woman—she knows what she is doing—but a girl ! why, I should be afraid to trifle with your feelings, lest you might fall into consumption and die.’

A peal of laughter burst from my lips.

‘ Die for love ? Men are not worth that kind of work,’ said I.

‘ No, they are not—but I have often been in trouble before—I have been engaged three or four times.’

Another ringing laugh.

‘ Would not one of them marry you ?’

‘ Oh yes, all of them, but it turned out in

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every case we had not money enough between us, and so their friends broke it off : I have been advised to look out for an heiress, but I'd rather make money for myself and please my fancy—that's better than marrying for money.'

I could not say nay to that, and he got possession of my fan as the curtain rose for the second act of the opera, and we sat listening, until it again descended, and the long and loud plaudits rose and fell ; he was peering into the tiny mirror in the fannount, in very perfection of good-humor with himself, enough to cast a glamour of sympathetic delight over all the world but me. I warned him of the fate of Narcissus, saying he was too much enamoured of himself to be in love with any other. To this he made answer by a candid confession of sins.

' You are mistaken ; I have a weakness for a pretty face——'

' Other than your own ?'

' I am afraid so, and where I ought not. I'm a shocking fellow ; I know if I were to die now, I should go straight down to——' He named the place in a whisper that

made me shudder. ‘Only one thing can save me—to be married to a good woman.’

‘Women, after all! You cannot go to heaven without us.’

‘No, nor to—’ he named in parliamentary phrase, ““the other place” either, without women. There is no chance for me, unless a good wife will take me in hand.’

‘She will be answerable then both for you and herself.’

‘Not altogether. I’m afraid if I were a long time married—suppose ten years—and someone else were to make love to me, of a different style of beauty to my wife—’

‘You would “hold marriage vows as dicer’s oaths,”—that I can well believe of you.’

‘Oh, but I’d come back again.’

‘Should your wife take you on those conditions?’

‘Oh, I know you’ll say you’d rather put up with anything else than that.’

‘Yes, anything indeed.’

‘But I don’t see what harm it can do to a

wife, so long as she retains her husband's affection, and knows nothing——'

"To keep a corner in the thing she loves for others' uses," as Othello puts it.'

'Oh no, I don't mean that, I don't indeed! I shall be all right when I'm married.'

Whether he had been speaking the truth with too much candor, or merely magnifying his own defects to enhance by contrast his attractions, was a problem beyond my solution; I told him so.

'You were never engaged before?' he inquired. Silence. 'Then you must have me—you're not going to refuse me after I've proposed to you?' Silence still. 'You shall write an opera—we'll write it together—I'll have it produced—I promise you I will, and you'll be the Sappho and St. Cecilia of England.'

'Do you think so?'

'I promise—I give you my word of honor; your opera shall come out before the season is over, and before the autumn we'll be married.'

It was too much for a young composer to resist. I did not say 'Yes,' but I did not

say 'No' either, so he took it for granted that we were engaged, and so did all other persons whatsoever whom it did not concern.

It was passing strange. Have we any power or free volition in these things ?



## CHAPTER XII.

THAT'S NOT LONG IN DOING.

'In her first passion woman loves her lover,  
In all her others what she loves is love.'

BYRON.

I WAS not in love with him, that was all I knew : all I felt, when bending my ear to the earnest pleading that grew impassioned the more that it left me cold, was the echo of a voice coming between him and my heart, a voice so like his, that as I listened to him now, the tender weakness of love came back upon me, though not for him. To shut that memory out, I would grasp at any means, and the more that rumors were now coming over of suspicious circumstances attending Sir John Hope Trevor's illness, now pronounced mortal.

It was said he had been poisoned through the treachery of a native servant, bribed by one of the Princes of India whom the General had offended, to carry out this murderous revenge. But the thought flashed upon me that there was one nearer to him who desired his death, the bosom-serpent in whose kiss were mortal stings. It might be that, evil as she was, I did her wrong ; but the two things came upon me together, the husband's fatal sickness and the wife's passion for another man. I could not separate them in my own mind, though, for Arthur's sake, I locked my lips close upon the horrible suspicion.

My opera became my chief occupation, and the best antidote to mental anguish. I took my subject ready to my hand in my cantata of Cupid and Psyche, which only required to be developed in complete dramatic form to make what I thought a grand opera. Signor Stradella helped me with his counsels, Miss Raleigh with new words when wanted. The work grew quickly, like a plant set in a hot-bed to be forced up for a special exhibition, Charlie having found a chance to produce both it

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and himself, with an English opera company rash enough to open at one of the leading theatres in the overcrowded month of June.

As if the prospect were not enough to fever a young ambition with hope and fear, it was brought about, through everybody's will except my own, that the preliminaries to my marriage with the new tenor were carried on *pari passu* with those of his *début* in my work. One day I found an engaged ring on my hand ; it had slipped, I knew not how, from Charlie's delicate little finger on to my third, where it lay loosely, and apt to drop off, which being observed by Mr. Elliot at a morning call, he laughingly advised a plain gold hoop, and inquired when *it* was to come off?

'What, the opera ?' said I.

'Oh no ; the morning performance.'

'What morning performance ? They only sing in opera in the evening.'

'The morning performance at St. George's, Hanover Square. I am told it is to be before the end of July.'

Who could have told him ? Alas ! so it was appointed ; everyone concerned had

some reason of convenience to press me to consent. Lady Augusta St. Aubyn, ordered abroad for her health, was to be hooked on as an appendage to Lord Stormalth's yachting party for Egypt in the autumn. Charlie himself meditated a provincial tour with the opera company after his London *début*, and to take me with him as his bride. I was terribly put upon by modistes and confectioners in the way of trousseau and wedding cake; actually a bridal dress was got in hand, ready to be thrust upon me. However, I put a bold face upon it before my former flame, perversely misunderstanding him.

'Hanover Square Rooms? Yes; I am to sing there in the middle of June—in the evening.'

'Oh, but I mean the church, not the concert-room! All London is talking of your engagement—I want to know when I am to congratulate the happy man?'

'This comes with a special grace from *you*,' I retorted, his matrimonial troubles being notorious. 'Suppose that, having in mind the story of the tailless fox, I were

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to take your congratulations by the rule of contraries ?'

'I am quite sincere. I consider that you of all others ought to be married, to put a stop to your breaking of hearts—think how many poor fellows will be put out of their pain—I look forward to throwing the shoe.'

'But always postpone your congratulations on these occasions until your friends have been married a year and a day without a quarrel. On these terms who would congratulate you ?'

'I congratulate myself on my position ; three thousand a year and a house in Berkeley Square make all the difference in one's enjoyment of life.'

'Oh, Mr. Elliot ! I had rather a crust of bread in a garret, if I were a man.'

'Well, I'm not an artist, you see, I'm a practical man ; I think everybody ought to be married.'

'Do you ? and to their grandmothers ? If old proverbs are to be believed, such matches between young men and old women are made up by the gentleman in black !'

'Oh, you are too cruel, you bitter creature, *you* know, *you*—if I could have chosen—'

'I always said you would do it. I predicted what your dancing attendance on Lady Cameron would come to. I told you that you would do it, and so you have.'

'And so I have—done for myself.'

'Why did you so? How could you do such a thing?'

'I cannot account for it. I suppose one is mad sometimes; I believe, unless people were a little mad, nobody ever would marry at all.'

'And so I believe also—most devoutly. Are musicians mad, too? Why cannot one compose an opera, and have it produced, without all the world adding on marriage as an inevitable conclusion?'

'That I cannot tell you; every one seems to consider your Cupid's appearance in public as a good joke.'

'And my opera too?'

'The whole thing together; your engagement is the only part of the affair that society takes *au sérieux*.'

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Here was provocation ! and worse was to come from Cupid himself, who persistently handed me over all his little dogs to pet and take charge of—‘Pride,’ ‘Vanity,’ ‘Pomp,’ and ‘Fastidiousness,’ I named his four darling brutes—any one of which was more to him than the art we loved in common, but, alas ! in such different degrees. A terrible fear began to grow upon me, lest his all-devouring worship of self should swallow up the measure of talent he unquestionably possessed, and strangle in the birth the success we hoped to win in common. It was coming swiftly on, for good or evil, the double crisis of our lives ; the twenty-eighth of June was fixed for his *début* in my opera, three weeks later was named our marriage day, and it was now the middle of June. O fate !



## CHAPTER XIII.

### MATCHED.

REHEARSING my opera! occupation of all-absorbing interest to a young musician's soul! Marriage was to come after, but what of that? The first was enough to fill the day and shut out the other prospect; even Charlie seemed tacitly to acquiesce in this. Indeed, Lady Augusta's close chaperonage seldom left us alone together in the sweet converse that lovers use; we were almost like a French *demoiselle* and her *futur*, whom she may never meet without a witness until the irrevocable knot is tied; this also had to do with my taking so coolly my situation as a bride elect.

But for the opera! Signor Stradella, in

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superintending the rehearsals, found the prima donna engaged inadequate to her task. ‘She will fail, and ruin your opera,’ he protested; ‘on any terms engage the best talent and attraction that can be found, or—better still, do you undertake the part of Psyche; you can sing the music as well as Patti, or anyone else.’

‘But I am no actress,’ I remonstrated; ‘I should not dare to challenge the criticism of a London audience.’

‘You will not be criticised as an actress, you will be judged as a singer, and as such you can defy the severest test—you will look the part, and you have youth in your favor; no prima donna ever is expected to be a finished actress, till she is years older than you.’

‘Yes, but Patti would act at eighteen as well as she sung.’

‘That was a rare exception, and no one will expect you to follow it. You will appear as composer and singer in your own work, there will be a special interest in you, as such; your acting will be quite secondary to that.’

I had not the nerve to attempt it, espe-

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cially as Charlie set his face against the proposal. Many motives held me back, and he gave no such spur to push me on as might have countervailed them. I remarked he did not seem to care whether the singer cast for Psyche were unequal to the higher exigencies of her part, so long as she could get through it decently, leaving all the attraction to him; she might be plain, *passée* and a cold methodical artist—he did not trouble himself, wishing, if he could, to personate Cupid and Psyche too—that was Signor Stradella's comment, who insisted that the principal lady of the company should play one of the sisters of Psyche, and that for the heroine a special engagement must be made. After a series of quarrels and discordant pulling against one another, such as could be equalled by few save professors of the tuneful art amongst themselves, I was summoned to a rehearsal, when the matter was settled, and there, in the leading part, to my indescribable disgust, stood—Mrs. Forest.

It seemed I was to have nothing but annoyance from first to last, in this great enterprise I had longed so earnestly to

achieve—were it but for once in my life—the production of an opera. Any remonstrances of mine were silenced by assurances that the piece was safe with Mrs. Forest, and so I had to look on at the odious woman thrust into the last place in the world where I should have wished to see her.

In her wake appeared Colonel Barclay, upon that stage where he had no business, and I was not slow to tell him I thought so.

‘Why not?’ he answered, with a gibe, ‘I came to see you here ; if you may come, I may.’

‘Not at all ! I have business.’

‘Business ! no such thing ! *you* ought never to be seen here.’

‘I am an artist, and am not ashamed of the gift, I have worked for fame, as we women only can work, rather than be crushed : you have no right to come here in my way.’

‘I have if *he* has,’ with a look askance at Cupid ; ‘you don’t mean to say you are irrevocably engaged to *that*? ’ He spoke with all the contempt that could be thrown

into glance and word ; I don't pretend to know anything of music, but I do know he will make an awful failure ; give it all up, do now ! I would rather employ Mrs. Forest to take a theatre on purpose, and do your opera properly ; I'll do that for you, if you like, although I cannot understand that kind of ambition in a young lady.'

'No, you cannot understand it, colonel, nor me ; neither is there any reason why you should. Good-bye.'

I avoided him for the rest of the day, not without a sting in my bosom ; clubs and coteries, I felt, would endorse his prejudices, and the best chance of success lay with the general mass, who usually filled that theatre on first nights, the house being noted for a pit and gallery audience.

'Crowded and fashionable' to a fault was the audience assembled on the memorable night ; all Charlie's own intimate friends, who were sure to take up some particular spite on the occasion, all the celebrities, of the upper ten and literary sets, curious and contemptuous, were there ready, but with no indulgent ears, to give

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a hearing to the new opera and *artiste*. Nevertheless the house shook with applause at his coming on. How handsome he looked! Well graced with dignity of walk and carriage of the head, he looked an English noble, every inch of him, such a knightly form as the British public, like a well trained horse, readily submits to be ridden by ; but let the rider beware how he vaults into that unsteady seat, unless he be prepared to keep up a constant readiness of eye and hand to meet all emergencies ; otherwise, as neither horse nor public knows any difference of persons, he may find himself, by a sudden lurch on the part of the uncourtly animal, set down upon the top of his head on ignominious earth. Let the rider beware !

Boldly he struck into his first song, as a hero of his race might charge a battery, although I could feel his nervous tremors beneath his daring, and esteemed the more his courage in subduing them. He did not sing his best, yet better than could have been expected in such a trial. I felt the house was with him, as a whole, whatever critics might say : one of the most

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eminent was overheard by me pronouncing that the worst that could be said of the new tenor was, he gave good promise of future achievement ; success, I felt, hung in the balance, to be turned by the fall of a hair on either side.

The second scene was with Mrs. Forest, the too sophisticated impersonator of Psyche, affecting, with ill-disguised art, the childlike simplicity of the innocent though impassioned maiden. Here I felt I was missed by those whose interest in my success was most sincere. I was already associated with my work by the music-loving world, who on several occasions had heard my singing in Psyche's principal song, and with Charlie as my partner in the duets ; together we should have been accepted as an engaged couple rather than as artists ; the public would have gone mad with delight to see love made in earnest on the stage, but, their frantic curiosity baulked in this, they were ready to pounce down upon the divided turtle-dove of the pair.

He was not in tune with Mrs. Forest, somehow. With her fifteen years' experience she knew how to hit the mark,

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but with such weapons as caused my cheeks to burn with shame at what I saw evolved out of my own work, conceived and written in a spirit the very opposite of this woman's immodest interpretation. Young she looked in the face, with much help of paint; the effect combined with her rounded figure was that of a precociously developed girl, bold under her mock modesty, impatient to be married, and provoking her lover to step continually beyond the bounds of propriety—as they existed in my mind. What disgusted me won applause and gross laughter from several rows of her worshippers in the stalls, among whom Colonel Barclay made himself conspicuous, looking up at me every now and then, as it were to claim credit to himself for the dubious compliment he was paying me. I shrank to the back of my private box in sheer agony of shame.

I lay *perdue* till the crucial scene of the opera had passed, without open disaster, although I was not unconscious of a certain opposition in the house, over-borne, up to the present, by the plaudits of pit and gallery, who stuck by their golden

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opinions to a man and boy. There was a call for Mrs. Forest, and that lady obediently came on, led and supported by her Cupid, who stood aside while she received the triumphal honors of the evening, and after handing her off, according to custom, stood forth alone to receive his share. He was something to look upon in that Greek dress, with his classic features, rich curls, and faultless form, not an ill specimen of a Belvidere Apollo in the flesh, and the crowd took a visible pleasure to gaze at him matched by his own delight to be the focus to that galaxy of eyes; he literally sparkled in their admiration, with such smiles of triumph as the Goddess of Beauty's son might wear. No matter what his shortcomings, and much my mind misgave lest musical *quidnuncs* should pronounce him incompetent—these were not in question now, I felt. I hoped the victory was won.

Unluckily, the foolish youth had been at too much pains to secure his 'blushing honors' beforehand. To a couple of score of his club mates and others, he had said, 'Lend me a hand—do now, like a good

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fellow ; and oh, I do hope somebody will throw me a bouquet.' And so they did : a shower of twenty, at least, came conspicuously from one quarter of the house, provoking somehow the ire of a coatless *dilettante* overhead, who hissed his mind, as a denizen of the British gallery is bound to do. His dissent was drowned by counter bravoes, and along with these came more and more bouquets. It was too much : pit and gallery rose together and hissed and jeered. 'Take a stall in Covent Garden Market,' said one ; 'Send for a wheel-barrow ;' 'Nosegays, nosegays,' shouted several, with a running fire of jeers and laughter. Cupid, apparently unconscious of aught but admiring praise, took up two armloads of bloom, unscathed by the hailstorm of hisses that crossed the ringing peals of flattery. Then sundry persons bethought themselves of the unknown offender who perpetrated the production, thus damned by indiscriminating rather than faint praise, and there were calls of 'Author, author,' derisive, as I thought, while I clung behind the box curtains in horror of the broad light of the

gas above me; another call for the composer followed, genuine, it sounded, but undecided against the general opposition: I kept hid, shuddering at thought of the morrow, and critics of the morning papers.

These were contemptuously merciful, but my old adversary the *Empress* came out in her innate colors after the following fashion:

‘Authors and composers whose ambition leads them to suppose they have been kept in obscurity by some blindness, wilful or judicial, on the part of the public to their untried genius, are apt to thrust their imaginary claims into notice on every opportunity afforded by chance speculators at irregular seasons in the leading temples of the drama; these experiments usually end in abuse, such as furnishes new proof, were any wanted, that the unknown is invariably synonymous with the worthless in musical as well as literary work. A most remarkable instance was set before the crowded and distinguished audience assembled last Monday evening at the —— Theatre. A new opera was placed upon

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the stage, with every accessory of scenery and dress. Beyond these, we could discover nothing to praise either in the piece or performers, with one notable exception amongst the latter. The libretto was dull and heavy; the music, not altogether devoid of melody and flow, was more like a repetition (with slight alterations) of well-worn familiar airs, than any suggestions of the composer's own fancy ; he evidently expects to achieve greatness through suffering the creations of stronger brains to dilute through his own tympanum. Hence the mawkish passion of his lovers, contrasted by the mild fury of impossible Greek deities, making up a production of which a well trained pupil at any musical academy might be ashamed.

' Of the principal tenor we refrain to mention the name, being one too distinguished for discussion, as the demerits of his performance would in fairness require. An inexperienced amateur, he did most cruel injustice to the work (such as it was) of the composer, and we should strongly recommend him to court the suffrages of society in some other direction

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than that of an operatic singer. In the rest of the performance there was nothing to require notice, with the exception before alluded to of the Psyche, Mrs. Forest, who struggled bravely with a most ungrateful task, and alone, by her popularity and nerve, saved the opera from unqualified condemnation. We do not predict a run for this abortive production, beyond a few nights, neither do we anticipate any re-appearance of "this melancholy Cupid," under similar circumstances, before his too partial friends and admirers.'

Here was the fall of Icarus ! Good youth, he had thought to sun himself in the full blaze of popular favour, when the wax on his wings melted in the fire of his own vain imagination, rather than the 'fierce light' of fame ; and the penalty was to sink in the sea of obscure rank and fashion that goes to make the crushes of Mayfair !

What was I, either, but a crushed heap of impotent ambition ? Was I a true artist ? or had it been in mere adulation of my youth and adventitious gifts that men ever called me so ?

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Alas, I began to doubt of myself! Whither should the distracted brain of a musician turn to feed the enthusiasm which, as the worm dieth not, consumes the heart impassioned to conceive, yet impotent to produce, the fruits of genius in art and song? That same week my opera was played, a telegram from India announced to the world the death of Sir John Hope Trevor, and to me my rival's freedom to accomplish her evil will. Oh, to forget these things! to shut them out from my eyes and thoughts for ever!



## CHAPTER XIV.

### NOT MATED.

'Oh, God of Love ; I know he doth deserve  
As much as may be yielded to a man.'

*Much Ado about Nothing.*

WHATEVER thorns of misgiving I might forge to prick and sting myself, as to the ill-success of my opera, were crushed down by Cupid with that power of self-assertion which ignores defeat and failure, and exhibits the lighter phase of that quality by virtue of which a British soldier, when beaten in the field, does not know the unpleasant fact : a questionable advantage in the case of a man whose chief enemy is himself. However, Charlie's hopeful views were borne out by audiences more numerous and distinguished by far than any-one concerned anticipated except him-

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self, during the fortnight's run he pre-arranged for Cupid and Psyche, and this being so, he assured me the thing was a success, and nobody cared for what was said in the papers to the contrary.

That fortnight hurried on my appointed marriage day ; how so appointed, in truth, I know not. It was all like a dream : a bridegroom moved about me, his form, a beautiful casket to the soul within, all that eye of woman could desire to look upon, a very Eros in impassioned wooing. Was it possible that the woman's heart could resist, unless pre-occupied by happiness, not sorrow, in another, such a lover and such a love ?

And I was cold while he was all ardor, as ice to fire ; yet one must melt or the other die. I had heard of the power of marriage to work marvels in the bosom of a maid, to turn her heart to her husband. I hoped it might be so—but not—Heaven forbid!—to marry one, and be taught to love another afterwards.

Whether it was the fact of his having spent the whole of his time for months in the preparation and performance of his part as the God of Love, or whether it was my

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indifference, or both together, that acted as a spur upon him, I know not ; men are apt to seek chiefly in the woman they fancy the gratification of some propensity of their own, often mere vanity and love of self, stronger than any other affection. So long as I refrained from saying 'No,' he was content with himself and all the world, provokingly happy and triumphant while I felt wretched past all expressing. Every eye remarked us, he with the peculiar sheepish air of supreme stupidity which characterises a man gone idiotic lengths in love ; I, it was constantly told me, looking better than I ever had done in my life ; strong flirting, it seems, being an effectual cosmetic in any case. I certainly never said 'Yes,' but the foregone conclusion was hurrying on fast ; in a few days my fate was to be sealed past recall.

I grew desperate to break through the spell that bound me like strong chains. I turned on every side, and there was no help for me, nothing but bridesmaids and wedding presents to fill the house, and congratulations from every human being that approached me. I would escape from

it all, and go home to Grannie before the fatal day. Such was the wild design I meditated, and prepared to execute by writing her in guarded terms, to test the thin coating of the lava I should walk upon, before I plunged my foot in the burning stream. She answered me as follows:

‘ MY DEAR CHILD,

‘ Your wish to revisit your old home is all right and natural ; you know you are sure of your welcome with me, lonely as I have been without you, and you can imagine how happy you will make me by spending as much of your honeymoon as your husband will allow in an old woman’s dull society.

‘ I consider your marriage quite a god-send to both parties ; nothing else could take either out of the scrape you got, I may say, each other into. Of course, Charles Bouvierie’s coming out as an opera singer is a mere *jeu d’esprit*. Singing for gain is not the occupation of a gentleman, unless he could make a very great deal of money indeed, which he would never be allowed to do ; and we must consider ourselves wonderfully for-

tunate that your name never appeared in print as having invented the opera. Cupid and Psyche is known to be a most improper subject, quite unfit for a girl. I deny your having had any hand whatever in the business to everyone I meet. You must never revert to such scandalous folly again. When you are a married woman you will find plenty of more consequence to take up your time, and will have other views besides composing music, which is not a woman's province. You can play and sing in private as much as your husband likes. I hope you will both see that it is *infra dig.* to be talked about before the public, except according to your rank and position ; then all bygone attempts in that way will pass as escapades, and be soon forgotten, and stabling your horses together will be the best finale for both.

' I was horribly mortified to hear of that odious woman being left a widow by poor Sir John Hope Trevor. There cannot be a doubt that Arthur will marry her now ; everyone knows he cannot with honor avoid it. If you were not married first we should beeverlastingly disgraced ; so that we ought

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to be obliged to Charles Bouverie for saving us from shame.

'I am not able to undertake the journey to see you married, but shall expect you, at farthest, the day after the wedding; my advice will be of great consequence to you, just at that time. You will have to adapt yourself to your husband's ways, and you can tell me everything as you could not do to any one else. Marriage is a great and startling change in a girl's life, and she wants a mother continually with her to help her in accustoming herself to her new position. With best wishes for your happiness,

'I remain,

'Your affectionate Grandmother,  
'ANNE FORTESCUE.'

I was hemmed in on that side, and without hope of breaking out in any other direction. Charlie had given up his projected opera tour, leaving me no excuse to postpone the marriage on that head. Lord Stormouth's yachting party was preparing to get under weigh, Lady Augusta completing the full complement of hands, I too

dangerous, while yet unmarried, to be brought into contact with certain combustibles about to be stowed on board in the persons of her ladyship's sons. Fate-driven, I wore on till it came to the eve of the day fixed for my marriage, while I prayed in vain that my evil genius might take any shape but that.

That last night I slept as I had not slept for many nights before, and as I lay in the early dawn between that sleep and the misery of the morning consciousness I dreamed a dream: I had bound myself by vows, and was married to Charlie, then I saw Arthur. He spoke to me and said—I know not what; he kissed me on the lips, until I felt dying, and then I knew it was not himself but Charlie in his borrowed likeness, and afterwards it became a woman, with the serpent's hiss and sting, that coiled around me her unnatural embrace. Was she not one flesh with him now, and I no longer his, but another's?

If that could be, and I to live! I rose not from my bed that morning, but lay there that appointed wedding-day, and many days after in restless pain. My head

was burning like a coal of fire, so the doctor procured me a respite from execution of the impending sentence passed upon me by the world: while loving only one, to wed another. It was not to be.



## CHAPTER XV.

### CHANCE AND CHANGE.

'In faith if wimmen hadden written stories,  
As clerkes hav, within their oratories,  
They wold have writ of men more wickednesse  
Than all the merk of Adam may redresse.'

CHAUCER : '*Wife of Bath*.'

I WAS revived by the sun, whose daughter I was born, when August brought its days of heat, intolerable to Londoners, but of which so few can be counted in an English summer. I lay quiet as I was left, by medical authority, thinking of my old home in the West as a haven greatly to be desired in comparison with the life of trouble and vexation without profit which was all I had earned as the fruit of my

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labor through restless love of change. Had it not been better for me to have remained there from the first, waiting patiently till fate should otherwise dispose of me? Was there now no possibility of return, not through the dreaded gate of marriage, but to be and to do the same as in former days? Or if not, how and whither could I escape and be free as a bird of the air, shaking from its wings the tangling lime, as I would fain have shaken off the signs and tokens of inevitable matrimony with which our small house was full to inconvenience? That the 'happy day' was postponed through my illness, that I was still to be dealt with as Charlie's intended, was the undisturbed conviction of that young gentleman himself, concurred in by all the world besides; neither was there a living soul to whom I could unlock my secret mind.

I was sitting at an open window, to catch the rays of an afternoon sun, oppressive to others, but a healer and life-restorer to me. Lady Augusta had gone out to arrange her yachting equipment, while I, not well enough to accompany her, re-

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mained alone in the house. There was a ring and a loud knock, as if of visitors, unexpected now that the season had come to an end. I stood up, and tottered to the bell to deny myself to any stranger, but before I could do so, one of the last persons I should in my weak state have desired to see, Lady Cameron, swept through the portière curtains and stood before me.

I sank into a seat, too much taken aback even to ask her to do likewise ; she, supplying my omission, flopped herself down into the lowest and weakest chair in the room, which happened to be beside me. Settling into it with many protestations on the chair's part, she seemed to consider her position beside my invalid couch as part of the fitness of things. Her want was soon made manifest to give and receive sympathy.

' My dear,' she began, ' I came to you because I said you must want a change——'

' You are very kind ; that seems to be everybody's prescription for me.'

' Yes, you do want a change, but not marriage, bless the child ! If you but knew all, you would not be in a hurry to thrust

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your neck into that noose. I've done it twice.'

'Certainly I am in no hurry to do it once.'

'But your home is broken up, I hear; you must do something, go somewhere—why not with me ?'

'With you, Lady Cameron ?'

'Yes, with me, my dear. I can't live alone: I must leave London, give up my house in Berkeley Square, sell my furniture—yes, all my beautiful furniture—there is no other way, my lawyer tells me, to get rid of that man !'

'Do you mean your husband ?'

'Yes, my husband ! Mr. Elliot has made me insure my life for his benefit, because my own three thousand a year dies with me, and now he is unfaithful to me. I have found it out, and I live in fear of being poisoned at every meal.'

'What a pity ! I wonder what you married him for ; he is so inferior in every respect to your first husband.'

'My dear, how can you tell ? Sir Duncan was a distinguished man, and I was very proud, at eighteen, to marry so high, though he was old enough to be my grand-

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father. My dear, do you never be taken in like that. I thought I was going to be an old man's darling. No such thing !'

' How was that ?'

' He had several darlings—why, the very servants in the neighbourhood. Once a housemaid of Lady Stormouth's, who was washing down the door-steps, threw a pail of water over him, and told him to take himself off. Oh ! he was a very bad old man.'

' And is Mr. Elliot a very bad young one ? You had great courage to undertake a second.'

' My dear, I was always alone, I could not stand the life ; if I had had children, I should have remained as I was, but I never find fault with anyone's marriage who has got nothing else to do.'

' You were not afraid he was too much of a ladies' man to be constant ?'

' He was six-and-thirty years of age ; old enough, I should think ! Why, at Scarborough, I was literally besieged by hosts of young men under thirty. Mr. Elliot had such a way with him, till he carried his point.'

'No doubt you felt flattered by his attentions.'

'Flattered! Yes, he knew how to flatter until we were coming back from church; then he threw off the mask, and I saw him in his true colors. "You old fool, wash that paint off your face," he said to me: I was not such a fool as to put my money in his possession—only myself—and he did not want me, but the other. That he shall not touch a penny of, so sure as I am a woman scorned, and so I will break up my home to prevent him from living upon me.'

'Well, that is very hard for you to have to do. Is there no way to separate amicably, without scandal?'

'Without scandal, indeed! I could obtain a divorce if I chose; plenty of evidence. While I was out of town with Lady Stomouth, he had that opera-bouffe woman, Mrs. Forest, to lunch with him, here in my own house; when I came back the parlor-maid told me, and gave me warning at the same time. Only think of the indignity!'

'Well, that was imprudent; but he may

have meant no harm—Mrs. Forest is the fashion.'

'No harm! fashion! pah! my maid's evidence would convict the wretch in any court. They had lunch together at my table. I could sue for a divorce, and I might marry again if I chose.' This was a slip of the tongue in the venturesome dame, who was mad enough, chance favoring her, to rush upon her ill-luck a third time in the matrimonial lottery. She paused, as it were not to be carried off her feet, and resumed—'But so could he marry again, and he would, and marry that woman, too, and wink at anything she chose to do after. Oh, you don't know, he'd do anything for money.'

'But could she marry him ?'

'Oh yes, she's a widow now, and so she's dyed her black hair yellow, to catch the men : but he shan't marry her, the painted hussey, as long as I can keep myself above the ground.'

This reflection cast by the pot upon the kettle struck me in a light all the stronger that the sun, shining in through the window behind her, fell full upon the im-

'In that case, it is best not to marry at all.'

'That's the most sensible conclusion for a young woman to come to—'

'To defeat her fate, as a ship might object to be sunk, or a theatre to be burned—for they do say such things must be.'

'Never mind what they say—never ask anybody's advice, nor follow anybody's advice, if you'll take example by me.'

Here was counsel probably good in itself, though from an unpromising quarter, as grapes to be gathered of thistles—at least, it had the merit of being out of the common, and diametrically opposite to that tendered to me by the lady's husband.

'Nevertheless, you found you could not live alone—how can I ?'

'You ?—no ! I should think not ! A single girl like you !—that's just why I thought of you to live with me, now I must have somebody ; you're twenty, and can pass for over twenty-one, so that I can take a house or lodging in your name, and my husband can't put his foot inside the doors—you'll be a protection to me, and I don't see that you can do anything better with yourself.'

Hardly anything worse, I thought, but for the custom of the world, certain to condemn a solitary wanderer through its mazes, who chanced to be a girl, doomed by the accident of birth to hook on somewhere, as a side dish at the banquet of life ; guilty of unpardonable sin in sharing the existence of another woman with neither love nor respect to cement the bond—merely convenience on either side ; yet such seemed now the inevitable for me, being yet too young to stand up for myself against that worldly tribunal of opinion, which, as Byron retorted upon Madame de Staël, a man might brave, though woman must submit to. Must she, and for ever ?

I did so now, thanked Lady Cameron, and consented, for a time, to join her as a companion on terms of equality. This stroke of business done, we discussed the direction of our route.

‘ Anywhere you like, so long as I am safe from Mr. Elliot’s persecution. Won’t he look foolish, left with no money to pay a single bill ? Yesterday morning he honored me with a visit in his dressing-

gown before I was up, if you please, and thought to abstract these bank notes from under my pillow ; but I was too wide awake for him—I was not to be caught napping. I grasped the crucifix at my bed's head, and dared him to come and take them. So here they are, my dear ; you take care of them for me—and that's the last I have seen of my gentleman.'

' And you leave me the choice of our destination. How delightful !'

' My dear, anywhere you like. What do you say to India ? That's far enough off for him not to attempt to follow me, without cash, and I'm quite at home in India ; that's the place to enjoy life. I spent my happiest days there as a young wife with all the men in the station at my feet, and waited on and carried about on men's shoulders like an empress ; nothing to do but dress and sleep. I never knew what it was to set my foot on the bare ground.'

' I should not choose that for a healthy life !' I put in, reflecting upon the awful example before me of a waist some forty-five inches round. ' Supposing I were to grow into a ball, as singers are said to be

apt to do sometimes, and that is only permissible for contraltos : I am a mezzo-soprano, and bound to keep slim.'

' Slim ! I was as thin as a whipping-post at your age. When I was married, Sir Hugh could span my waist with his two hands ! Bless the child ! you'll be as round as a teetotum before you're thirty.'

' Not if I can help it,' thought I ; but said, ' India, after all, is my native land.'

' Yes, and you would be appreciated there, your high caste origin on the mother's side would make you known to the native princes ; why, you'd be a little queen among them ! And then your singing would be the rage in the best European society in the three Presidencies. It is better to be worshipped in India than snubbed in England—I have found it so.'

' You were very sorry to come home ?'

' Well, no, my dear, I was glad at that time ; India was spoilt for me by that overbearing creature, Lady Di Hope Trevor ; she was a few years younger than I, and she married over my head, an officer of superior rank to my husband. There was no standing her as a girl, and still less as a

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married woman ; she had the power, and she used it, to get me slighted or passed over on every official occasion ; she made India too hot to hold us two.'

'And now she is there, would you go back ?'

'No ; I vow that would never do ! and so she is there and likely to be a greater woman than ever, provided society will look on and wink at all those two have been making up between themselves while her husband lay on his deathbed. I say it's disgraceful and infamous. I don't care how high the people are—Arthur, that great hero, as they call him, deserves to be whipped at a cart's tail.'

'I do not think I could bear to go to India,' I faltered, turning pale, as I felt by the rush of blood to my heart.

'You feel so ill ?' inquired Lady Cameron, happily misunderstanding me. 'Well, I do not say we ought to go there, or any decent people, unless matters are first put straight in that quarter ; people do sometimes get their deserts, and I am sure I wish she may be exposed and punished. We'll discuss our destination another time.'

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I'll see you again to-morrow or the next day.'

With that she was gone, and soon afterwards I was left to rest undisturbed by Lady Augusta, who came in merely to change her dress for dinner at Mrs. Dodd's, like ourselves, a last lingerer in town, whom Lady Augusta condescended to grace, when better company had fled and left closed shutters behind. As the gloaming deepened into the starry night of sultry August, I sank to rest upon my invalid couch, and thought until I thought myself into a dream.

I was going to disappoint the general expectation by not doing that which everyone else had laid out for me to do ; with this sense was mixed some kind of enjoyment stealing upon me, as I lapsed into half consciousness. I must go away ; yes, out of the way, till such vague future time as I might become a fit subject for bridesmaids and bridal surroundings of every kind and a theme for courtly chroniclers of wedding presents to expatiate upon ; all these adjuncts which possess such mysterious charms for the common of

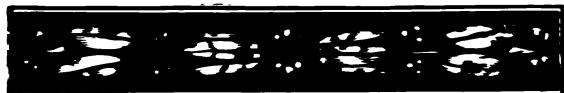
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woman kind, and are wont to occupy so much space in a girl's life, I was to put from me for this present time, it might be for ever; even the ghost of a wedding-cake haunting my sick dreams with its ice-like fantastic forms standing out in white shadows upon the dark of sleep was intolerable to my memory—I must put all these things far away from me, and seek only rest. How would this affect him, my bridegroom in anticipation? Surely it could not much matter to Charlie, after his three or four broken marriages, to undergo the like mishap only once more. Had I not heard him say a man could fall easily in love in a case that suited him? All these must have suited him, after a fashion, and so must I, and so why not some other? Should I be pleased so? No, not quite; but it had not quite come to that yet: there was enough else to weigh upon my mind for this time. Charlie's was a comfortable philosophy; he would have no heart to break like mine.

Why could no lover move about me, and become part of my daily life, but Arthur's image must come between?

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troubling my sleep with dreams of him, lying slain upon a battle-field, or in his bed, stung to death by the poison of a serpent with a woman's face ; and visions of her who had done all this being tried as a witch, and condemned to be burned as a widow, after the Indian usage of suttee— all confusion of times and places and laws —one horror only pervading all. I was startled by a loud knocking at the hall door, such a knocking as I recognised through having heard it before. Opening my eyes and looking around me, I knew it was a dream, the knocking with the rest ; but no ! that was repeated, that was a reality, that was the summons of fate, the stern sovereign whose black rod now cried 'Open the door,' to what calamity I knew not, but come weal, come woe, this messenger, like death himself, could not be shut out nor stayed by mortal hand.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### TRUE FOES.

'Friends meet to part, love laughs at faith,  
True foes, once met, are join'd till death.'  
BYRON.

THERE could be no shadow of a doubt about it : she, my enemy, whom I thought in India, had come back to meet me in living flesh, and such stood now before me.

Oh, how changed from what I had known and dreaded her ! Her very dress bespoke neglect of all form, that extinction of self-esteem which is the very last attribute a woman can put off, even in utter despair. She was draped in yards upon yards of widow's crape, hung anyhow about her : a black silk paletot, half covered with the same lugubrious adornment, and stained with the dust

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of travel, disguised the elegance of her shape; a crape bonnet and double veil, evidently knocked together in haste by some unpractised hand, completed a costume indicative of long absence from the centres of European fashion, in the fallen votary of the queen of graceful caprices—the effort to please seemed to have departed along with the hope; her very beauty that had seemed so long unchangeable, at last had suffered change.

Yes, there were lines upon her forehead and hollows about her eyes, deep and cruel traces of a sterner hand than time's; yes, defeat and shame had found her out at last, who had carried her fair head so high in her panoply of charms, 'terrible as an army with banners.' Now she was rather to be likened to a ship dismasted, her colors torn to rags, beaten back into port, as a bird of prey, with drooping wings, and crest dabbled in her own gore. She caught me by the wrist, as if to make me sure of her bodily presence before she spoke to me.

'You are not married yet?' she said,

tightening the grip of her white fingers.  
‘Why are you not married?’

‘By what right do you ask me such a question?’

‘By what right! I mean to know. I saw your marriage announced in India; the day was named much earlier than this. I believed you were married, or they should have killed me before I would have left—no matter; that has nothing to do with you.’

It was borne in upon me that it had, through her strange slip of the tongue, though pulled up as quickly as a tripping horse by the steady hand upon the rein. I looked her fixedly in the face, saying:

‘You are a widow now. You have come to England to save appearances, while Arthur remains in India. You want me married before the year is out, when you mean to marry him. You are afraid of me——’

‘That is false, false, utterly false!’ and she burst into the loud scornful laugh as of old, but it rang hollow and bitter, with a swell of hysterical passion through its fiend-

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like mock—that mock now turned back upon herself, away from me !

‘ Marry him ! afraid of you ! ’ she gasped out. ‘ No, no ! I have something more than the puny rancor of a girl to fear ! Arthur and I dare not live within the same hemisphere, it seems—marry, oh no ! that would bring the murder home to our door, in the wise judgment of malicious fools who lead the world’s opinion—marry, marry !—we are further off from that than ever—if I did wish for my freedom through my husband’s death, I’m paid for it now ! ’

‘ Sir John came to his death by poison—so ’tis reported in England—was that true ? ’ I said, turning the fierce glare of my eyes full upon her.

‘ I know what you mean—but that is false—I had no hand—I am innocent as man may judge me—the poison was in my heart.’

‘ You do know the cause of his death ? ’

‘ True, yes—it was by poison—I know not how ; some thought it was suicide ; but it is not for me to say that.’

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‘How could he be poisoned without your knowledge or suspicion?’

‘His health began to fail soon after we returned to India, more than a year ago. One doctor after another was unable to discover the cause ; a consultation was held, and then, for the first time, I heard the mention of poison ; all the servants—every one who had access to the house—were strictly examined, but no proof could be found to confirm suspicion. After that, Sir John recovered for a time.’

‘And was that long before he died ?’

‘No ; I read the announcement of your marriage in an English paper—you are engaged to Charles Bouverie ; that is true.’

‘I cannot deny that there was foundation for saying so.’

‘You *are* engaged to him ; this was a subject of discussion between Arthur and me. We saw much of each other just about that time—I do believe my husband came to have suspicions which wronged us both ; still, he had my hand without my heart, and he may have felt that his life was but a burthen on mine—it was not my fault if he did take it so.’

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‘What do you mean by saying this?’

‘I mean he may have taken it to heart, and put an end to himself with his own hand—he was just the man that could do such a thing, once his trust in his hearth and home was turned to hatred.’

‘And if he did, you are as guilty of his death as though your own hand gave him the cup of poison; the world has judged you justly, after all.’

‘That do I protest against—there was no proof of suicide; he fell ill suddenly at the last, and took laudanum to still the pain; this was before the doctors came.’

‘Why did you not send for them immediately?’

‘The same night he was taken sick my favourite ayah, who had been like my right hand for two years, disappeared, no one ever knew how; Sir John could not be left alone a moment, his sufferings were so intense. I was confused, puzzled, but I did send, and the doctors came before morning; they did all they could for him, and that was worse than nothing.’

‘You stayed with your husband to the last?’

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‘No, they put me out of the room ; they said they could not attend to both him and me. I was hysterical, panic-struck—they used the stomach-pump, and gave him blows on the feet to keep him awake : he would have slept to death, they said. Most cruel mean were used to save his life, but all in vain—had he survived, I do believe he never would have recovered their treatment of him, and when that failed, they turned their hard eyes and foul suspicions upon me.’

‘Why did they so without some cause?’

‘Cause ! what could I have done more than I did, to save him ? I could not answer all their questions—my mind was disjointed—I could only speak in a wild jumble of words and things ; my ayah had fled, who could have accounted for many circumstances as to which I had no answer to give ; this was distorted into a plot between us, to get rid of the woman’s testimony ; other native servants in the house, who hated her for her favor with me, creatures who had eaten my bread, will give evidence to destroy me.’

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‘Was not that bread your husband’s too,  
who came so cruelly by his death?’

‘You say that to me, as if I could know  
who bore him malice or wished—for some  
selfish end in their own advancement—to  
see me one day Arthur’s wife : my ayah’s  
disappearance threw all on me—can  
nothing clear me—nothing?’

‘You may well repeat it—nothing : not  
all the water of ocean that divides you  
now from him.’

‘Well, then, it was the report of your  
marriage led to all : yes, it was the talk  
about that drew Arthur and me together—  
take that for your share in this horrible  
work.’

Here was a link of fate subtle as the  
network forged by the jealous god of fire  
to enclose and convict the guilt no tongue  
could prove : such close connection between  
the effect and cause as was symbolized in  
that old Greek myth does in truth pervade  
the course of life and action within us :  
how can we discern the grain of dust by  
which providence weights the scale against  
us, in the great balance of things to be and  
not to be ? .

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‘Yes, yes, it was all through your marriage ; take that comfort to yourself if you will go on with it ; marry—it will be best for you ; keep yourself out of the fire : we dare not marry, but that is no bar to our faith in each other : no other woman can Arthur ever marry, so long as I live ; I hold him by his honor the same as married to me !’

‘A hideous tale altogether ! Why have you come here to tell it to me ?’

‘Should I tell you, of all others, but that it cannot be concealed ? Ha, ha, you will hear enough ! hear all you will, all you can ! you have heard my story first.’

This struck me as passing strange : such unnatural confidence from her to me ! I could not comprehend it, nor divine her motive ; still, a question formed itself upon my lips, without my own consciousness of the full sense of my words.

‘You would seem innocent, but yet—who will believe your story ? Is this what you would bring me to do, of all others ? and for what ? Does Arthur believe you innocent, and I will ?’

‘Oh God, that he does not ! I have

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been made to appear in his eyes a treacherous poisoner! And if it were true, should his be the hand to cast stones at me? What could I have done, but for love of him?

‘What! should he take a murderer to his bosom, believing in your guilt?’

‘Don’t say that, or I will kill myself, and lay my blood at your door. No, no, no, no! they may drag me into court as a witness—they may cast all sorts of slurs and suspicions upon me, perhaps implicate him—but they can never say that—I dare them to the proof of it, before God and man! and you, girl, take care what you say! Remember, my disgrace must be Arthur’s too: as such he will take it to heart, and die of it—yes, die! If I am to be destroyed, he too must perish, name and fame, and life! We are one in love!’

‘A horrible fiend-like love it seems to me; you would not loose your hold of him, to let him live; you would keep him to die rather, like the evil-hearted woman of Solomon’s judgment: this is your love, a jealousy akin to hate. No, you do not love him—you would poison his soul, as you

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poisoned your husband's body : murderer !

I darted my eye through her as the serpent meets the adder its foe : she started back in fierce recoil against the awful charge repeated this second time.

' Murderess I am not, and as to love, how dare you speak of that of which you can know nothing ? Girl, you have sought to take him from me ; you thought your youth an allurement, and that he would yield to that an unnatural preference over me, to whom he has been bound for years and years, with stronger ties than any mere formal bond of husband and wife—we missed that only through the accident of fate—'

' Accident ! fate ! you made your fate for yourself, heartlessly rejecting him because he was poor—'

' No, that is false ! He was colder than I, and proudly held aloof—who knows what I might have done if he had urged me then with the same love that has grown between us since our lives have been thrown into one course, side by side ? We might have been married, boy and girl, and his name

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might never have been heard of beyond the obscure grave, which is all the reward so many brave young Englishmen have won in the desperate game of Indian warfare. 'Twas I who raised him to the post where name and wealth could be earned by valor and genius ; he owes all his greatness to me alone.'

'And therefore, you would stand between him and all hope of a virtuous love for ever! You would corrupt him to an infamous intrigue.'

'No, not so : there was great friendship between him and my husband ; Sir John's presence gave a sanction before the world to our intercourse—if I did hope—I could indulge that hope only through the prospect of being set free by his death.'

'Equally guilty in that way, perhaps more so—false to the spirit of your marriage vow—whether you kept the letter or not, God knows—it can hardly signify much, after what you have done—why should you tell it all to me ?'

'Because Arthur sent me away from him, compelled me to come back to England, and here I find you still un-

married ; I have come to forbid you to hope—if you dreamed of any hope—to take him from me. Branded with crime, or acquitted, alive or dead, I hold Arthur for my own.'

I could bear it no longer, in my weak state ; I cried out :

'Leave me, leave me ! go away ! unless you want to see me die. You are killing me—go ! go !' and I sank into unconsciousness.



## CHAPTER XVII.

AT MY WITS' ENDS.

'Oh, for such means !  
Though peril to my modesty, not death on't,  
I would adventure.—'

*Cymbeline.*

How long I so remained I know not, but my eyes opened on a confusion of troubled thoughts some time that evening : I could realise nothing until I went to my rest, and, in the common expressive phrase, slept upon it all. I awoke in pain of heart, as my custom was for years ; then, as my eyes drank in light, the sharp misery of the morning was past, and my vision grew clearer and clearer both as to the cause of all my sorrows gone by, and the things that must be in time to come. I could

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discern Lady Diana's motive from the first until the present hour : true, she had loved Arthur—much of woman's love, it has been said, depends on eminence in man : he was a great man now, and she, woe worth the day ! had lent her hand to make him great —hence the strong tie between them : but something had happened or been done that forbade their union ; he had cast her off, so far as close intercourse was concerned, and she, in some way connecting me with that act of his, fearing my influence, or hoping that I had put thereon the extinguisher of a husband, had sought me out, impelled by a host of feelings impossible to analyse: this was my conclusion.

Hence, everything in my world was changed to me: an Indian born, it might well be in my power to discover and bring to light what must for ever remain an impenetrable mystery of crime, if tested only by European searchers after truth, and the grim game of hazard between right and wrong, which our lawyers call justice, as applied to the native growth of Oriental turpitude. In a word, I might clear my rival of imputed crime, which she had not

committed, clear her, for Arthur's sake, as the odium of suspicion resting upon her must cast a taint on him : yes, clear her, even if by this I drew them together again : clear both, for the sake of the one I loved, even though the effect might be to give them licence to unite their lives, as now they dared not do : such might be the horrible consequence, yet I would put all to the chance, and serve him faithfully, even unto my own death. To India, then, I must bend my course, and that right soon.

Then I bethought me of what I should do with Charlie : though the bar between me and Arthur were insuperable, yet I felt enough of passionate weakness in remembering him to keep me from any other. While ruminating on what was best to say or do under the circumstances, I was disturbed and all my meditated excuses overthrown by the abrupt appearance of my bridegroom expectant, all devotion and impatience, eager to fix, without further delay, the day that should bind and seal me—now that my restored health seemed to leave me no fair pretext for putting him off any longer.

Nothing could be more painfully embarrassing : he had caught me unprepared for this outbreak of feeling on his part, such as I could never have thought was in so slight a nature as his ; he whom I had thought of as an adorer merely of his own charms, had now, it was too plainly palpable, worked himself up into a passion for me.

How handsome he looked, in his earnest pleading ! and yet how coldly in my heart I turned away from him, while yet I spoke with kindness on my lips ; in sincerity and truth I did pity him.

‘ Why will you not say the end of August ? ’ he pressed again and again upon me, ‘ in a fortnight, or three weeks ; surely that is not too soon after our long engagement ; we must get married, or people will say one of us has jilted the other—you cannot help yourself.’

I cast about with my eyes to look for some way by which I could get out of this dilemma.

‘ At least it must be put off till I am well and strong enough to go about.’

‘ I can’t see that, when I am ready to

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take such care of you—I deserve to have you when I want you ; I can't get on without a wife or somebody to sing with me ; I'm sure I have taken pains enough to win a dozen girls,' and he smiled down 'superior love,' in Miltonic phrase, upon me.

My reply was, silence, for want of a better answer, and this piqued him the more.

' You don't mean to refuse me now, because I'm a poor man ; you knew that when you were leading me on so far ; you've made an actor of me and ruined me in my own set ; all through your opera, my lady. I always thought you a little genius and you turn out a coquette like all the women I've ever known.'

' I hope not,' I said, dreading in good truth that I had indeed been conformed too much to that evil-hearted class of self-seekers and gold-worshippers who go to make up the huge majority of the world called great. ' I hope I am not a coquette, although I do not wish to marry now ; when the day was fixed, I took ill, danger-

ously ill—you know it—you must not press me again so soon.'

' You are playing with me.' I could not deny it. ' You do not love me one tenth part of what I love you—after letting me love you so long, if you are going to say " No" at last, I shall go mad, and go to the bad altogether.'

' Why should you be so impatient? you are young to marry—almost a boy.'

' Boy! I'm five-and-twenty; I have always said if I was not married before that, I would lead a short life and a merry one; yes, it will be all your doing—I shall go as fast as I can to the devil.'

' Not unless you are yourself that way inclined.'

' I say girls have no heart. I'm a man any woman might take a fancy to—all the world calls me a charming fellow, a Cupid, an Adonis; and you—you won't say you'll have me now. I'll commit suicide, and then where will you be? If I kill myself for a warning to other poor fellows, no man will venture to propose to you after. Oh, Lily! you'll drive me headlong to destruction! I love you madly, indeed I do!'

What had fired him, thus to carry him out of the love of self, which I had thought the 'be all and the end all here' of his disposition? Was it my coldness that drew out the Promethean spark from icy flint? Always I had found in my indifference to mankind lay my chief attraction for them; like a flock of sheep they will follow a strange face, but may not be hunted with impunity, for once let the object of their pursuit turn round a bold front, and they will scatter, not to be caught by any device of allurement.

Now I was fairly driven into a corner. If, while believing Arthur pledged to my rival, I had even then shrunk at the point of marriage with another, how much more now? now there was, if not hope, at least uncertainty to hold me free from any man but him. What excuse was left me to gain time? Should I tell the truth? No; impossible; that was the last thing I could tell! I behaved in this supreme ordeal like a woman and a coward. I paid Charlie with words only, putting him off with a promise to make up my mind in a fortnight, and allowing him to put thereon the construc-

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tion most favorable to his wishes ; my purpose was to write to him when the time came, which good intention proved to be of those that go to the paving of the bottomless pit, the abyss whose floor must sink into sloughs of despond beneath such reparation for ever.

'Ve—very well,' resumed my lover, with the worst stutter to which he was liable, or not, according to the state of his nerves, now by me terribly shaken. 'I'll go down to Stormouth Park on Hubert Robinson's invitation ; they are rather new people, the Stormouths, and want me to push them up a peg—so I shall oblige them, and give myself something to think of, besides you, Miss Lily, morning, noon, and night. This day fortnight, remember, I shall come here for my answer ; you pledge your word not to put me off then without yes or no ?'

I acquiesced, equivocating ; my resolve was taken to be many a league away when that day of reckoning came ; thus I was safe in consenting. Then, as it were, to ease my conscience, I questioned him, saying, 'Tell me, you have been engaged three times already, and on each occasion,

when the marriage was broken off, did you go mad, or feel inclined to commit suicide, as you say you will for me ?"

'Oh, yes, I did—for a time—a man gets over these things somehow.'

'There, indeed, I believe you.'

'Are you making a fool of me, Miss Fortescue ?'

'No, not I ; a fool is born, not made.'

'The same as a poet, eh, or a musician ? Never mind, so long as the cap don't fit. I will come back to you in a fortnight, remember.'

We have never met again. Before that day fortnight, I was far away on mid ocean, and he, whatever he felt 'for the time,' lived down this as all his many failures, enough in themselves to break the heart of a man ; resembling thus the renowned Spanish monarch, Queen Mary's spouse, whom the historian describes as exempt from that organ.

Happy in the imperfection ! Charlie Bouverie, or Cupid, he will bear this last title to his tombstone, and till his dying day keep up his harmless play of gathering hearts ; liked by all women, though deeply

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loved by none—a ladies' man by nature, a confirmed bachelor by predestination of irrevocable fate. This I say of him, though he is still young ; as a singer, whenever he tempts his chance before the impartial public, he comes to grief, but keeps a place, much envied in his own world, as an *artiste de salon*. Good luck and fair weather go with him through the voyage of life !

When he was gone, I took myself to task with a shudder at what I had almost done. It was time for me to get away from the world on the brink of whose whirlpools I had passed so many times, seeking treasures on its treacherous banks, and picking up, at most, the broken fragment of some costly shell, bred in the deep waters, whose edge had scarcely wet my feet. As an artist, I knew I must live and work in broader seas to deserve my rich reward ; as a woman, I felt I was not born to live altogether on vanity. I lay on my sofa, thinking of all these troubles, and casting about for a way out of them. I was pent in by them, crushed, almost the breath out of my body, the fire out

of my soul—I lay oppressed by darkness.

There came a loud knock at the door from a hand I knew. I sprang up revived, like some poor imprisoned miner shut in without light or food, who hears a comrade knocking upon the walls of coal that divide him from the rescuer, come to dig him out of the black pit of deep waters. I rose, bounded down the stairs, and fell into Lady Cameron's capacious embrace.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### TO THE WORLD'S END.

'Why, I'll exhibit a bill in the Parliament for the putting down of men.'—*Merry Wives of Windsor*.

IN less than forty seconds passed together I was made aware that the Lady Cameron of to-day was another, and, on points of vital import to me, an altogether different person to herself of yesterday. In dissuading her from giving up England for India, I had succeeded according to my wish, at the time; now, my task was, to veer round back again from a determination diametrically opposite, a person who, for all the world, could go her own way and no other; the problem was, how to turn this towards a direction of my own,

while seeming to follow her lead. Hard was the task to me, who for my own part would have rather dared to go through the whole world alone than in her company ; but I could not risk myself upon such a voyage without the protection society esteems proper, having respect to Arthur's feelings, such as they were known to me, and my fear to embarrass him.

'I'll have Horatio up before the court,' she burst out ; 'it's come to that at last : no mortal woman can bear it any longer,' and she sat down deliberately to cry.

'I am sorry for that—has he done something worse since last you told me about him ?'

'Worse, I should think so ! he makes a point of giving me every provocation—within the verge of the law, as he says. I don't believe it ; there must be some redress for me : he laughs at me, and tells me he will agree to an amicable separation : he wants to get a maintenance out of me don't he wish he may !'

'But he can insist upon living with you, while you keep your house in London and remain in England ?'

'Yes ; if I turn him out of doors, he can sue me for restitution of conjugal rights.' The wretch !—if I can only find legal proofs of his conduct, I can be rid of him without a penny—no divorce though, I won't gratify him by divorcing him, to let him marry that woman.'

'What, Mrs. Forest ? Has he seen her again ?'

'Seen her ! he has been dining at her house—I've set a detective to watch him, but I'm better than any detective myself, to do my own business in my own way : I found out he was there, through the fishmonger who supplied the salmon that day. I saw it down in the miserable man's book to her account.'

'But what had that to do with your husband ?'

'To do with him ! I should think it had : if that proof in black and white is not enough to satisfy any judge and jury, they must be a dozen of buzzards and fools—that's my opinion.'

'Did he deny it, or attempt to excuse himself ?'

'Deny it ! of course he denies every-

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thing : and what do you think is the excuse the unblushing villain makes for himself ? Why, that there is a Society wanting for the protection of men—that a man can't help being made love to against his will, by every widow that looks at him ; that he's afraid to go alone in a railway carriage in the same compartment with a lady for fear of being kissed in a dark tunnel.'

' Nay, he would rather be the delinquent in that case—no offence to masculine vanity.'

' He says the contrary ; that women attack his virtue—oh, the abominable, mean, hypocritical, pettifogging devil ! He was once in a lawyer's office, reading to be a barrister ; I have found that out to my cost : he is cunning enough to avail himself of every quirk and chicane to get the mastery of me. I'll be even with him : on that I have made up my mind.' This declaration brought down the heavy hand of the ireful dame upon a small table, upsetting it, well-nigh smashed.

I answered, softly, ' Then I am afraid you will find no satisfaction by going to law with him, only waste a heap of money upon him, more than he seems worth.'

' He is not worth it, if it could be helped ; and my lawyers do advise me to wait for more evidence ; but then he stops in the house and taunts me with having condoned everything—he defies me to make a case against him.'

' Then you will be obliged to fight him by flight, like the Amazon Queen who defeated Cyrus.'

' What's that story ? I believe I shall, after all, break up my home and go abroad, and take you with me, for a blind : you'll come ?'

' I shall be most happy—if you decide, I can be ready in twenty-four hours.'

' That's all right—and we'll go any where you like to choose, all over the world—only not to India.'

' Not to India unless you like that best ; the chief objection to India is now removed. Lady Diana Hope Trevor is now in England, and can never return to the East, or show her face in any society there.'

' Who told you that ? how can you know more about it than I do ?'

' I saw her myself : she came here, and betrayed her position to me.'

'What! she is not a friend of yours?"

'Very much the reverse; but she may have thought to make use of me for her own ends, because I am an Indian born.'

'You are not such a fool as to let her do that, for no thanks at all?'

'Most surely I am not; I only hope the whole truth about her may come out one day.'

This little speech was made for the concealment of my thought. I saw how much it behoved me to keep my real aim secret from my companion; she would have crossed it without remorse, through hatred of Lady Diana, even though that hatred were the common bond between us twain. I, less un-Christian, would even spare my rival, rather than involve Arthur in her disgrace.

'I can tell enough of her doings in India long ago to make the three Presidencies too hot for her: she'll not think of returning while I'm there—she had better not. If she had her deserts, I say she ought to be hung for her husband's murder. Wives used to be burned at one time for that crime, and 'tis a thousand pities the law

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was ever altered before my Lady Diana's case.'

'I see you know her, what she is, better than I do.'

'Well, my dear, what do you say? I'll put my house and furniture into the agent's hands, and you'll pack up your wedding things; they'll do for an Indian outfit for you, and we'll be off and take French leave of these miserable men.'

'As soon as ever you please—let it be in less than a fortnight; we shall leave behind our two disconsolate swains.'

'I would go to the ends of the earth away from mine. Ah! well, my dear, I've had two husbands, and if I were a young girl now, I declare I would shun the very sight of a man! You'll remain as you are, if you take my advice.'

One advice only I was willing to take of this overmuch married dame, and that was neither to seek nor follow the advice of any fellow-mortal, such being invariably, as I proved, a little blinder than myself, where my own course was to be chosen through shoals and sunken rocks on either hand.

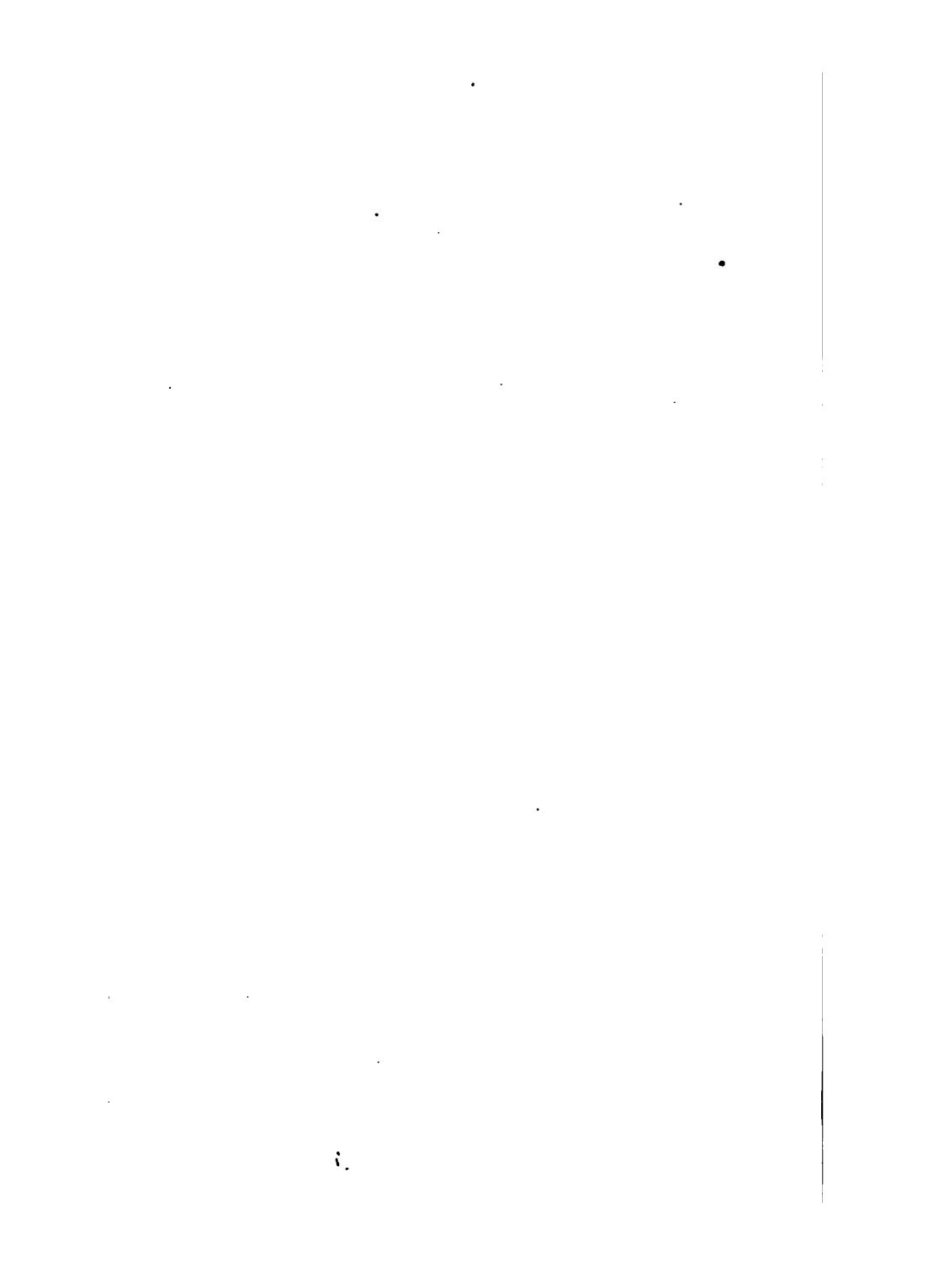
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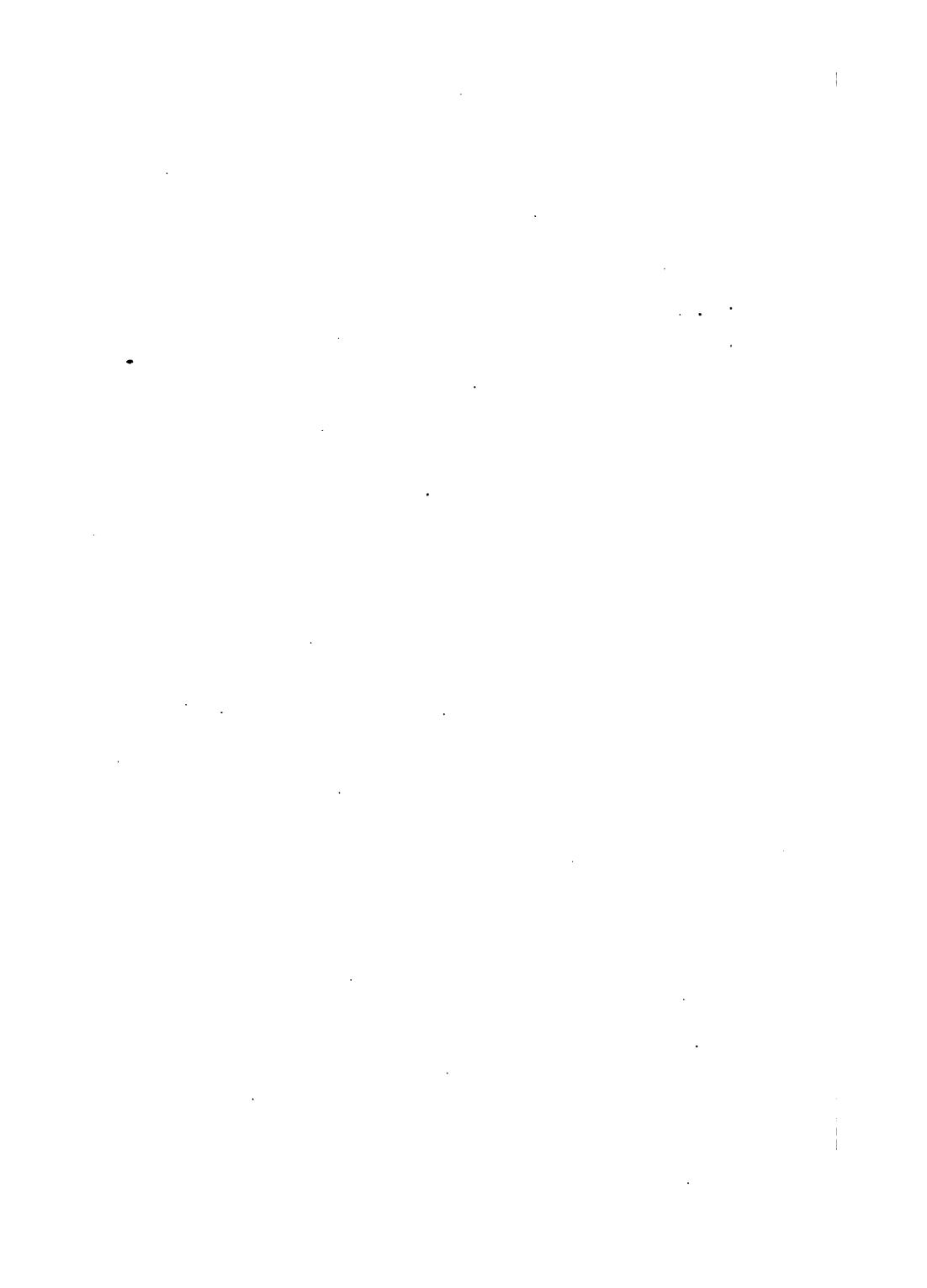
Certainly, I took counsel only with my own heart in my resolution now.

To India? Yes. To meet again? Arthur, my only love, dare I ask myself that question, which Heaven alone might answer in the leaves yet unopened of our book of fate? Not I—no, not I!

To India, then, if not to win, to deserve his love, to save his name and fame, even though, unthanked, myself to die.

END OF VOL. II.









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